SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 540. FOR WEEK ENDING MAY 6TH, 1899. [ONE PENNY.

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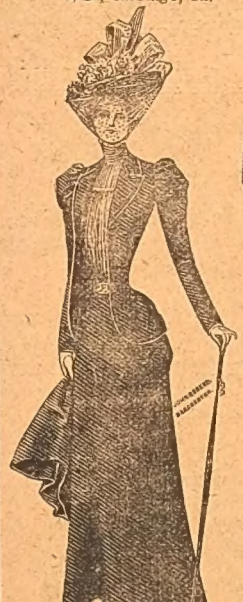

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For High Stakes

CHAPTER 1.

A Scandalous Bargain.

One of the great Trans-Atlantic steamers was coming into port just at sunrise on an October morning. After a long storm, the day was breaking fair.

Early as was the hour, the passengers were all astir in anticipation of a speedy arrival.

Cabins, decks, and state-rooms were scenes of buoyant confusion, of packing, and dressing, and chattering, while from time to time there was a rush forward for a longed-for glimpse of the land ahead.

In the midst of all this joyous excitement one person sat unmindful and unmoved by it all. This was a woman, young, and, despite her toilet—she still wore the heavy wrap and unbecoming hood suited to the stormy passage—singularly attractive.

Stretched in her deck-chair, her languid head reclining against the back, her face, with its delicate curves and delicious colouring slightly upturned to the soft, blue atmosphere, she seemed isolated and indifferent about her animated surroundings.

The girl was Eglantine Villars.

The moments wore on. The shore, the principal buildings were already in sight, but still Miss Villars did not move. Her face remained the only one on board the steamer that was turned away from the appproaching shore.

Among the last of the lady passengers to appear upon the deck, where all were at length assembled, was a handsome woman of thirty-five or forty, dressed in admirable taste, in a tailor-made grey cloth suit, with well-fitting gloves and boots and a sparkle of diamonds here and there about her person.

"Mrs. Montagu is herself again!" exclaimed a tall, sandy-haired young man, as he caught sight of her, and striding towards the lady—his face beaming—he offered her his arm.

"Thanks," she said, with a winning smile; "I am independent of all mankind this morning."

"Ungrateful woman!" murmured Caxton Leigh, with an affectation of wounded feelings. "But how you needed me two days ago!"

Mrs. Montagu moved on, still smiling, returning a bow, or replying to a congratulation, the cynosure of all eyes, her gown the envy of every woman's heart.

"Where does she get such clothes?" queried Rose Singleton.

"I believe her gowns are born, not made," responded Hortense Rivington.

Stopping from time to time to exchange a few words with a group, Mrs. Montagu was evidently directing her course towards the chair where Eglantine Villars still sat unmoved.

It needed only a casual observation of her transit across the deck of the steamer to disclose what a popular woman she was. From Hortense Rivington, to whom she had revealed a style of dressing her hair which improved the contour of that young lady's face, to Geoffrey Barton, the elderly stockbroker, whose nightly partner she had been at whist, every passenger on board the steamer had a sense of being in some way indebted to Mrs. Montagu. She was one of those women whom the world pays on demand, accepts, as may be said, at full value. She was beautiful, intelligent, with fine manners and exquisite tastes. What more can be asked? Had she social position? She knew everybody. Had she family claims? Unquestionably, since she was perfectly indifferent whether her acquaintance was sought or not. Her means were apparently sufficient for her requirements. She was, in short, too desirable a person to omit from one's list, and she had, during the six days' passage, exchanged visiting cards with every desirable woman on board the steamer.

Miss Villars' face was the only one which made no response to Mrs. Montagu's salutation.

"We shall be in in an hour," said that lady, pausing, with an air of resolution, beside the young girl's chair.

"Yes," was the indifferent assent.

"Is your luggage ready for the Custom House officers, and your plans otherwise arranged?"

The question was put in a careless, matter-of-course way.

Miss Villars raised her head in surprise to confront her questioner. There was a flash of resentment in her beautiful eyes, a sweep of indignant colour across her face.

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"You are very kind to concern yourself about me," she said haughtily, looking the intruder full in the face.

"Possibly you judge my motives aright," said Mrs. Montagu, in the same steady tone.

"Really!" was the languid response. "I—I have not concerned myself to judge your motives at all, my dear Mrs. Montagu."

The flash of light and colour faded out of the lovely face the graceful head sank back into its previous position, and the firm curve of the lips would have indicated to a less sensitive person than Isabel Montagu that the conversation was at an end, so far as one party to it was concerned.

Mrs. Montagu only smiled faintly—a fine, transient way she had of smiling without distorting her features.

Someone had left a chair close by unoccupied, and, drawing it up to the young girl's side, Mrs. Montagu said quietly:

"You are in difficulty, Miss Villars, and I am the person to help you."

"Pardon me," said Eglantine coldly. "I daresay you mean well, but——"

She raised herself again to repel the unwelcome advance, and her scornful lips and flashing eyes concluded her sentence.

"Oh, yes; I will pardon you," said Mrs. Montagu calmly; "but, in return, you will listen to me."

She took no notice of the young girl's gesture of dissent.

"The time is short," she went on, "and before we are interrupted I will proceed without wasting any more words, to what I intend to say."

Miss Villars sat silent, through surprise, and gave her attention.

"I am a woman who knows well the world, Miss Villars," proceeded Mrs. Montagu. "I have made a study of your situation from what I know of your story, and have come to a decision which I am going to confide to you."

"You know my story?" repeated the girl.

"Certainly. I know that your father failed in business two years ago, and that with what he could save from the wreck, he sailed for New York, taking you, his only child, with him. You and he have lived well during these years. But a month ago he died leaving you alone in the world and almost penniless."

Mrs. Montagu paused, and her listener asked briefly:

"How did you know all this?"

"Your father and I met more than once, Miss Villars—in fashionable gambling houses," was the significant reply.

Eglantine Villars was drawn to her full height now. Her beautiful hands, resting upon the rug that lay across her knees, were opening and shutting nervously.

"And who are you?" she asked coldly of the woman before her.

"I am a woman who has played at odds with fortune, and won the game," was the reply, "and I am ready to help you to do the same."

Miss Villars shook her head.

"You are mistaken in me," she said. "I am not made of ambitious stuff. Life has proved a cruel disappointment, and I only ask to be let alone. I am not quite a pauper. I shall go to my relatives in a quiet Midland town, where my accomplishments may be in request, for I am a good musician, and know three modern languages. A small income will suffice ——"

Mrs. Montagu listened impatiently.

"How absurd!" she interrupted. "A beautiful girl of twenty, who might be a Society favourite, marry into one of the best families, and shine in the sphere for which nature has fitted her——"

Eglantine was about to speak, but Mrs. Montagu prevented her with a gesture.

"Your village would prove intolerable," she continued with increased energy, "you know that it would. How have you lived? Journeys, balls, receptions, art galleries have made up your existence. Fancy pottering about in a waterproof and thick boots to teach stupid girls to thump on cheap pianos!"

"Let me alone!" cried Eglantine, with a burst of temper. "What concern of yours is my life? Don't you suppose I have counted all the annoyances you foretell? Do you think I would accept them if I had any alternative?"

"I can provide an alternative."

Mrs. Montagu had brought the conversation to the point which she intended to reach, and she uttered the words composedly, and paused to let them take effect.

This effect was precisely what she had calculated it would be.

Eglantine Villars looked straight into her handsome face, which, however, told no tales, and asked abruptly:

"How?"

"I am ready to offer you a home, to introduce you into Society, to furnish you with money for dress—"

"You are generous, certainly."

"Not at all. You did not wait for me to name the conditions upon which I will do this."

"Conditions?"

"Of course. In return for my advances, you will discount your future fate."

"I do not understand you."

"I mean, simply, that, with any sort of management, you are sure to marry within a couple of years. You will marry, of course, for money, then you will pay me back for making this possible."

"How do you know that I shall marry for money?"

"I know that you *can* do so, and your acceptance of the bargain means that you *will* do so. That is all."

"You confuse me," said Eglantine piteously.

"I have tried to be clear," said Mrs. Montagu, with faint sarcasm. "Turn round," she added, "and look at the shore. What a busy, crowded scene. We are almost there. Will you accept my protection, share the cosy 'flat' in South Kensington which belongs to me, enter upon a round of congenial pleasures, resume your schoolgirl friendships, live in an atmosphere of admiration, or will you go to the dead-and-alive town you have in mind, and throw your youth away?"

Mrs. Montagu rose.

Eglantine buried her face in her hands. Mrs. Montagu turned slowly away. The sound of her light, retreating step aroused the girl suddenly. She rose from her chair, and extended her hands. Mrs. Montagu turned her head.

"Take me," said Miss Villars, in a mechanical tone. "I can't be left alone."

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Montague Plays Her Cards.

Up and down the rose-banked staircase surged the brilliant throng. Mrs. Rivington and her daughter were "at home." The hostess was in silver brocade, with rubies and diamonds for jewels. A superb woman

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in her trailing, glistening gown, she stood beside her tall, girlish daughter in her Nile-green costume, with a string of amber beads, and a bunch of yellow rosebuds for her only ornaments.

Hortense Rivington could not be called handsome, but she had youth and grace, high spirits, and the prospect of a fortune.

Of the two or three young men who hovered in the

By her side walked Miss Villars.

débutante's vicinity, availing themselves of occasional pauses in the arrivals of guests to chat with her, Caxton Leigh kept a little nearer, in a privileged way, to Miss Rivington's side than the rest.

He was a tall, blonde, handsome fellow, of an old and distinguished family, of which he was the last representative. With the family fortune he had inherited the family tastes.

He was a lover of beauty, a connoisseur in art, his habits extravagant, his society in demand, and it had been remarked prior to the evening of Miss Rivington's ball, that Caxton Leigh was just the fellow to marry an heiress.

His acquaintance with the Rivingtons had begun on the steamer, by which he was returning from a three months' run through the United States, and during the month or more which had intervened since their arrival at home he had paid court to the young *débutante* in a significant, noticeable way.

Hortense had just given him one of the yellow rosebuds from the loose cluster which she held in her hand, and he was engaged in fastening it in his coat, when a little stir in the crowd—that change of expression which comes over an assemblage of people as it does over a single face—attracted him.

Glancing towards the door, he saw Mrs. Montagu and Eglantine Villars enter the room together.

Mrs. Montagu was dressed in her usual rather severe taste—in black velvet, Princess shape, with a long, narrow train; the corsage was rather open, revealing her white throat and neck, and sleeveless, showing the upper portion of the beautiful arms above the long gloves. By her side walked Miss Villars.

The young lady was a stranger to most of those present, and even to such as remembered their sea-sick, unhappy travelling companion, her present appearance was a revelation. She was dressed in white satin—a short gown of thick, lustrous material. A pink coral comb in her fair hair, and a large pink gauze fan which she carried, gave a rosy tinge which made one think of the dawn.

"A young Aurora," lisped young Tom Singleton, just emerging from the ball-room built out beyond the drawing-room, and communicating by arches twined with roses, through which floated the strains of a waltz and visions of motion and colour.

Mrs. Montagu and Miss Villars made their greeting to their hostess with polite brevity, and moved on down the room.

Five minutes later, Mrs. Montagu had smiling assented to play a rubber of whist presently with her friend, Geoffrey Barton, and Miss Villars had her pretty satin programme marked with half-a-dozen engagements to dance.

The last of the names placed on this programme was that of Caxton Leigh. He had yielded his place by Hortense Rivington's side, and followed Mrs. Montagu and Eglantine down the room.

"I saw so little of you on board the steamer, and yet you seem like an old friend. How travelling together does reveal people to one another," he was saying.

"I was ill nearly all the passage. How stormy it was!"

"Horrible. Some days Mrs. Montagu was the only lady on deck."

"She has crossed several times, you know."

"Yes. She is a tip-top traveller, but I did not even know you were in her charge. And now you are living together."

"Yes, for the winter. You will come and see us—on Mondays?"

"I will, indeed. But here is Singleton—to claim you for the next waltz. No matter. When his pleasure is over I shall still have mine in reserve."

Miss Villars and her partner were floating down the ball-room, and Caxton Leigh stood leaning against the arch watching them, unconscious of the fact that Hortense Rivington's yellow rosebud had fallen from his coat, and lay at his feet on the floor.

Meantime, Mrs. Montagu, at a card-table in an adjoining room, had drawn off her long gloves, and was shuffling a pack of cards lightly through her pretty hands.

"You have an uncommonly charming girl to introduce this season, Mrs. Montagu," said Geoffrey Barton, from his seat opposite.

"Yes, there can be no doubt of Miss Villars' attractions, both personal and pecuniary," was the careless reply.

"Ah, she has money, then?" inquired Mr. Singleton, who sat at Mrs. Montagu's right.

"It would be out of the question for me to chaperone her if she had not," said Mrs. Montagu, absent-mindedly placing the pack of cards on the table to be cut.

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"I hope you'll not have to watch Miss Villars so closely as to prevent our having an occasional game together," said Geoffrey Barton.

"We shall be at home on Mondays, and glad to see you," the lady answered, proceeding with the deal.

"We must have some small stakes," said Geoffrey Barton, drawing a shilling from his pocket, "just to keep us awake."

"Mrs. Montagu, do you agree to that?" asked Mr. Singleton.

"I am obliged to do so when I play with Mr. Barton," was the careless answer. "If I do not he always forgets which suit is the trump."

A couple of hours later, when the whist party broke up, the pile of gold and silver upon the table amounted to five pounds. Mr. Barton gallantly handed his partner a banknote in exchange, and she slipped the folded paper inside the glove she had now resumed.

"Well, I, for one, never gambled before," said Mr. Singleton angrily, as he left the table.

"If you had played in the houses of the aristocracy as much as I have, you would not be able to make that statement," laughed Mrs. Montagu." Even Bishops play whist for small stakes. They do not call it gambling—except, perhaps, when they get angry because they have lost the rubber."

The gentlemen laughed, and Mr. Singleton was silenced.

CHAPTER III.

The Price of a Friendship.

Mrs. Montagu's "Monday's" at Cardinal Mansions were very pleasant occasions to some, at least to those who frequented her little salon. Her receptions were quite unpretending. She had but one drawing-room, the floor was covered with rugs, a line of water-colour sketches hung along the wall, there was a fire on the tiled hearth, a low tea-table stood in a corner.

Mrs. Montagu herself was to be found behind this tea-table. Miss Villars stood usually near the fire, resuming her seat when opportunity came, upon the small Chippendale sofa, beside which there was always a large china bowl full of flowers.

The room was generally rather crowded. There was apt to be a literary, or dramatic, or artistic "lion" present. Mrs. Montagu had a faculty for finding distinguished people, and making them think it was worth while to drop in at her receptions.

Young girls always came in abundance, because they were pretty sure of finding a good many young men—very nice ones like Caxton Leigh and Tom Singleton—and the matrons came, because some of them could never divest themselves of the notion that this charming Mrs. Montagu would require watching.

By six o'clock, however, the guests dispersed. It came to be remarked as the winter wore on, by those who were last to leave, that they always left Mr. Geoffrey Barton behind.

Was the rich stockbroker to fall a prey to the fascinating widow? It certainly looked so. Be it how it may, Mr. Barton stayed to dinner regularly every Monday.

After dinner on this day, Eglantine had what she called her "Recital Club" to meet in the drawing-room, and in the small adjoining room the card-table was set out; two or three men usually joined the whist party, and the young people in the drawing-room generally took their departure long before the last rubber was ended.

On Monday evening the "Recital Club" decided to see *Cymbeline* played at the Thalia, in lieu of proceeding with their customary programme.

Unconventionality was their watchword, so the gentlemen drew lots as to which lady they should escort, and Caxton Leigh drew the number that represented Miss Villars.

The slips had been placed in a little glass jar, and Leigh was the first to draw.

Young Singleton drew his sister, and Dick Dalrymple Hortense Rivington, these six being the members of the "Club." The award was announced by Leigh, whereupon Singleton—always hot and hasty of speech—sprang to his feet and exclaimed excitedly:

"There has been cheating in the draw!"

"Shame! shame!" said two or three voices.

"I say there has been cheating!" said Singleton, aloud. "I saw it plainly. Leigh arranged the slips, and took his pick."

"Let's try it over again," said Dalrymple. "I am satisfied, but I want everyone else to be, of course."

"The draw was perfectly fair, and I decline to try it over again," said Leigh haughtily. "At a proper time, I suppose, Singleton will explain himself to me. But this isn't a proper time."

"I have no explanation to make. Explanations are for others," said Singleton hotly. "I shall take my sister, and go home. I have suspected for some time that *cheating* went on in this establishment, but I have only just discovered that a man whom I called a friend is mixed up with it."

Rose Singleton attempted to stop her brother's excited words, but without avail. Finally, she caught his arm.

"Tom, you shall come with me this instant!" she cried.

Caxton Leigh's blood was up now. He placed himself before the Singletons, intercepting their progress towards the door.

"After you apologise to Miss Villars you may go, not before," he said fiercely.

"Has Miss Villars appointed you her defender?" sneered young Singleton.

"This is disgraceful," said Hortense Rivington, "for you two jealous men to quarrel so—and before us! Rose, stay with me. Mr. Dalrymple will take us to the theatre. Eglantine,"—turning towards Miss Villars, who stood like a statue, marble-pale, and wordless—"why don't you order Tom Singleton and Caxton Leigh to leave the house?"

"Miss Villars," said Leigh promptly, "I am at your service. Shall I go?"

"Let Mr. Singleton go, I beseech you," faltered Eglantine.

"I am bound to obey you," said Leigh, stepping back from the position he had taken.

Rose ran across the room.

"Dear Eglantine, I am awfully sorry for—Tom's temper. But, it is best for me to go with him, isn't it?"

"Certainly. Good-night."

"Look at the time—ten minutes to eight," said Miss Rivington as the Singletons took their unceremonious departure. "We shall miss the first scene. Let us start at once."

The sound of the loud and excited talking had reached the ears of Mrs. Montagu and Mr. Barton, who happened to occupy the adjoining room alone on this occasion.

Mrs. Montagu could not conceal her agitation, though she said playfully:

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"Beauty has its perils. Tom Singleton and Caxton Leigh are both head over ears in love with my pretty Eglantine. It sounds as though we might have to interfere to prevent them from coming to blows."

"I heard what sounded like 'cheating' in this establishment, Mrs. Montagu," said Mr. Barton. "Is there cheating in love, as well as at cards?"

For once, Mrs. Montagu's controlled features changed, in spite of herself.

"That is a strange question for you to ask, Mr. Barton," she said.

"Oh, no offence," said the keen-eyed old stockbroker, dove-tailing the pack of cards in his hands. "Of course, my dear madam, I know that you haven't won my money quite fairly, and I happen to know, also, that Lieutenant Gesler, who plays with us from time to time, and usually wins, is—your—as vulgar people say—your pal!"

"Mr. Barton, I am a woman whose hospitalities you have freely accepted, and whose acquaintance you have not been ashamed to acknowledge. I can only say that your insinuations cut me to the quick."

"I am sorry to hurt your feelings, Mrs. Montagu."

He rose from his seat, and came and stood before his hostess.

The drawing-room was by this time deserted, and silence reigned around them.

"I have enjoyed your society, and I—*was willing to pay for it.* I have understood your position for some time. You are an adventuress—a talented, handsome adventuress. You live by gambling," were Mr. Barton's explicit words. "I discovered your capacity for cheating before we left the steamer."

"And yet you continued to honour me with your friendship and society?"

"Yes, Mrs. Montagu. I have an interest in this house, which even my discoveries could not destroy."

He paused, and the blood rushed to Mrs. Montagu's face. *He was making love to her!* His words could have no other meaning.

With all her plots and schemes, Mrs. Montagu had never weighed the chances of marrying the stockbroker herself.

She was not, in truth, desirous of marrying at all, and yet, as she listened to Barton's words, a vision of ease and luxury rose before her, and captivated her imagination.

She said to herself that she was not an adventuress from choice, but from necessity. As Geoffrey Barton's wife, she could live as irreproachably as a Roman matron.

She put out her smooth, soft hand towards the grizzled man of business before her.

"So long as I retain your interest I am not quite hopeless."

"I suppose I am worth something as a friend," said Geoffrey Barton, in a straightforward fashion, "and I propose to remain your friend on one condition, Mrs. Monatgu."

"And that?" she asked, smiling up into his face.

"Is that you help me to marry your pretty ward."

"To marry Eglantine Villars!"

Mrs. Montagu withdrew her hand suddenly.

"The notion seems to appal you."

"To appal me? Oh, no. I—I—can hardly imagine that Eg antine could have a more brilliant offer."

"I am past fifty, Mrs. Montagu. I do not mince matters. I am an old man wooing a young beauty. All I can say is, that I am willing to pay for my luxuries. Now, tell me what you think of my chances."

Mrs. Montagu recovered herself.

"There are reasons," she said, "which make me think that Eglantine will not decline the honour hastily."

"Ah! that is good. Pave the way for my success, and you may count upon me as a friend. But—there must be no great delay. This little establishment must be broken up before those words of Tom Singleton's have a chance to get noised abroad. I shall not want any shadow upon my wife's past record, you understand. As soon as Miss Villars accepts my offer, I shall wish to remove her to the care of a different chaperon. You comprehend me, Mrs. Montagu? There is no occasion, I trust for offence."

Isabel Montagu passed her jewelled hand lightly across her forehead. Discovery, exposure, disgrace—these were what threatened her. She had never been so near downfall before.

One thing alone stood between her and the threatened danger. This one thing was Eglantine's acceptance of Geoffrey Barton's offer. Would Eglantine accept?

Mrs. Montagu, hardened as she was, felt a little shudder of repugnance at the idea. How, then, would it strike Eglantine herself? But there was no question of sentiment. Eglantine was bound to marry—to marry at her bidding, and thereby indemnify her for all this outlay which had floated them in good society for the past four months. Eglantine was her debtor. The bargain had been deliberately made, *and pay day had come.*

"You have my best wishes—you shall have my best aid," was all she could say.

"Miss Villars is, perhaps, under some obligations to you?" said Mr. Barton.

"She is."

"It will be my pleasure to discharge them, with interest, when she gives me permission."

"I will let her know your wishes this evening on her return," said Mrs. Montagu calmly.

"And I will call to-morrow for her decision. For the present I will say good-night. Miss Villars will soon be home."

Mr. Barton took his leave, and Mrs. Montagu composed herself to await Eglantine's return, and to arrange the way in which she could approach the subject of the stockbroker's proposal.

CHAPTER IV.

"PAY-DAY HAS COME."

It was past midnight, and the luxurious "lift" at Cardinal Mansions was no longer in operation. Eglantine and Caxton Leigh toiled slowly up the great, stone staircase, on their return from the theatre.

They did not mind the effort nor the delay. It gave them opportunity for sundry halts upon the landings when Leigh could say, "Do lean upon my arm," and "Let us sit down for a moment;" and Eglantine would answer, "It is so late for me to be out alone." And her companion would ask, "Are you alone when I am with you?" To which no possible response could be given but a contented smile, on which the griffins carved in the stone looked down with mocking grins, by the soft radiance of the electric light.

"This is the last landing," said Caxton finally. "We have got to it all too soon for me. This has been a delightful evening in spite of its stormy beginning. But—I have to settle with Singleton still, and, before I do so, I want to be able to say, 'Yes,' when he asks again if you have appointed me your defender?"

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"I am sure you would be, in case of need," murmured Eglantine.

"Here is your door. Do you think Mrs. Montagu is up still?"

"Yes, indeed. You must not think of coming in at this hour."

"Then, Eglantine, I will say my say at once."

He caught both her hands, and held her steadily where the pale, pure light fell upon her face.

"I love you—love is a weak word—I worship you, Eglantine Villars. You know it, of course. But the time has come when I must say it. Now, darling, good-night. I do not ask a word—a look, even, from you. To-morrow I shall come for your reply."

He touched the electric button as he spoke, and the door was instantly opened by Mrs. Montagu, who had heard their steps and voices.

"How late you are," she said, as the girl entered the room, "and how excited you look. It is not in good taste to stay out so late without a chaperone. The time has come, Eglantine, when we must be careful of appearances."

"I shall not do anything that can be criticised," said Eglantine with spirit.

"The 'things which can be criticised,' have already been done," replied Mrs. Montagu, rather sharply. "What was the fuss between Singleton and Leigh before you went out?"

Eglantine was standing before the mirror, unwinding the long white boa from about her throat. Her eyes sparkled, and her cheeks glowed.

"I will tell you all about it in the morning, I am so sleepy," and she yawned affectedly.

"I am sorry," said Mrs. Montagu, "but we can't crowd everything into to-morrow. Sit down please. I have to talk with you to-night."

"The 'fuss' was nothing of any consequence," said Eglantine, still impatient to be gone to her room. "Tom Singleton accused Caxton Leigh of cheating in drawing me."

"And he added something about other cheating that went on in this house. What did he mean?"

"I am sure I don't know," replied the girl.

"It is time you did then, Eglantine, for *I am found out!*"

"Found out?" said the younger woman.

"Yes. Singleton has discovered that my card-table," she made a gesture towards the adjoining room, "supports me."

Eglantine turned suddenly pale. Her father had gambled during the last years of his life, that she knew. But that Mrs. Montagu was likewise a gambler, had never entered her head.

"Don't look so ridiculously scared," said Mrs. Montagu. "Where did you suppose all the money came from? What I do is no worse than every stockbroker does, only Society doesn't tolerate the same proceeding in a woman's drawing-room that it justifies in the city."

"Then you—do—gamble?" asked Eglantine stupidly.

"Simpleton!" cried Mrs. Montagu, "have you no nerves? Sit up and calm yourself. We have got business before us. Yes, I gamble, if you want to hear the facts put into plain words, and as it's necessary for me to win, and as my associates can well afford to lose. why—I do win, that's all. I have never been suspected before. It is *your* friends that have found out my secret now. There is but one thing to do—that is, to drop out of my present position. I can give up this suite of rooms at twenty-four hours' notice. It is just the season for a trip to Biarritz. In short, I have made my plans to efface myself completely from London Society. There is but one thing necessary to my successful retreat."

He caught both her hands.

She paused and looked at Eglantine.

"What is it that is necessary?" the girl asked mechanically.

"Money to pay our accumulated debts," was the reply.

"Debts?" still repeated Eglantine, parrot-like.

"Certainly. We owe everybody—who would trust us. Tailors, milliners, florists—"

"And have no money to pay them?"

"We haven't it in hand. And now, Eglantine, if you are alive and awake, listen to me. These debts are incurred for you. They are the advances I made, secured by your matrimonial chances. It was a fair bargain, of course, and *pay day has come.*"

Eglantine staggered into a chair on which she had been leaning.

"I understand," she said.

"And you are ready to fulfil your promise?"

"To fulfil my promise? Did I promise? I—did I say I understood? What I understand is that I am disgraced, ruined—that your protection was a trap! Oh, Heaven! why was I so weak, and you so wicked?"

She flung her arms upon the table before her, and burst into tears.

"You are weaker than I imagined," was Mrs. Montagu's contemptuous comment. "Save your

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dramatics and hysterics. You have need of all the composure you can muster. There is a way open out of all our difficulties, and that way you will have to walk in."

Her cool, scornful voice and unmoved features gave Eglantine a sort of self-control. She sat up and faced the woman who had imposed upon her youth and loneliness.

"What is the way?" she asked.

"Well, it is the way to the altar—with Geoffrey Barton."

Eglantine only stared.

"This evening Mr. Barton has made you an offer of marriage through me. He is very rich and indulgent. Your marriage with him will relieve us from all our embarrassments."

The girl heard the words as if in a dream.

She seemed still to be standing beside Caxton Leigh, still to feel his clasp upon her wrists, to hear his words. "I love you, I worship you. To-morrow you shall give me your answer."

She stood up, strong with the strength of passion.

"Marry Geoffrey Barton? I will never marry him. I am as good as engaged to Caxton Leigh."

"Indeed!" sneered Mrs. Montagu; "and you think Caxton Leigh will marry you when he knows upon what terms you came to live with me?—when he knows that your husband has got to pay your debts, why, his whole little fortune wouldn't release you from your obligations to me, Eglantine Villars."

"Do I owe so much?" stammered the confounded girl.

"When you accepted my offer you left the precise terms to me. I have as good as settled them with Mr. Barton. Nothing is required of you but your consent to become his bride."

A faint groan from Eglantine's pale lips.

"I cannot," she said, "I cannot. Show me a way of escape."

"I cannot show you what does not exist," said Mrs. Montagu. "Your lot is cast, and with a little self-control you can make it one to be envied. But whatever you make of it, you must accept it. Caxton Leigh, you will find, will repudiate your claim on him when the truth is known. He thinks you are wealthy, and that I am a woman of means. Wait till he finds out the truth. The little fortune you brought with you is swamped, of course, in the extravagances in which we have indulged. Practically you are penniless, and so am I. In this dilemma you have one resource. It is a marriage with the elderly stockbroker, who covets you, and who will pay well to possess you."

The clock on the mantel was striking three.

Mrs. Montagu rose.

"We have talked enough," she said. "The facts are clear. A few hours' reflection will cool your feelings. In the morning, when Mr. Barton comes——"

"I cannot see him so soon—not to-morrow—not till evening, at least. I am exhausted, tortured. Do not let him come to me before to-morrow evening," pleaded Eglantine.

Her plea did not deceive Mrs. Montagu.

She knew that the girl wanted time to communicate with Caxton Leigh. Well, the time should be given her. But, meanwhile, Caxton Leigh should know the truth; know that a great gulf yawned between him—proud, honourable and honest to the core—and this girl who had bartered away her claim to herself, and pledged her youth and beauty, in advance, to the highest bidder.

CHAPTER V.

The Cloud Bursts.

Four weeks had elapsed since the night of excitement just described.

It was a cold, cheerless March day. Mrs. Montagu sat in her drawing room in a stately costume of silver satin and Brussels lace, gloved, bonneted, evidently prepared for some great occasion.

From time to time she walked up and down the room in order to glance through an open door, where she could see reflected in a mirror the lovely form of Eglantine Villars, clad in bridal robes, sitting like a figure of wax under the hands of the "artist" who was arranging the bridal veil and wreath upon the broad, motionless head.

Upon the dressing-table before her stood an open jewel-case, containing a parure of diamonds, Geoffrey Barton's wedding present to his beautiful bride.

The coiffeur had finished his work.

"Will mam'selle put on her jewels herself?" he asked.

Eglantine motioned him away. A quiver of fear went over her pale, impassive face as she glanced at the sparkling stones.

As the hairdresser left, Mrs. Montagu entered the room, where Eglantine sat. She looked faded and haggard, in spite of her fine clothes. Evidently she, too, had gone through some sort of emotional crisis, which had shaken her firm nerves, and sapped her bloom.

"It is a quarter to twelve. We must start for the church in ten minutes," she said.

"I am ready," replied the bride-elect, in a strange tone.

"Eglantine!" Mrs. Montagu stood before the young girl,

She flung her arms upon the table before her, and burst into tears.

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Eglantine had looked for one moment with beating heart and tender eyes into her lover's face.

and her face showed deep agitation, "I want you, at this last minute, to say that you do not feel hard towards me; that you feel I have acted as seemed to me for the best; that you will not blame and hate me hereafter, for Eglantine, my child, I love you;" and tears, genuine tears, stood in the cold, brilliant eyes.

"I have nothing to say, no one to blame but myself, Mrs. Montagu. I was alone, afraid, on board the steamer. Life looked irksome and hopeless. Your offer came. If I did not understand its full import, that was my own fault. If I did not realise what it might mean to have pawned my life for a few weeks' amusement, —why, I must pay the penalty of ignorance."

"It will not be so bad as you fancy, Eglantine, when once this wedding is over. Plenty of girls of high principles and pure tastes would have married Mr. Barton if he had given them the chance. Thank you dear, for not blaming and hating me. I have not loved many people, and it would have hurt me to feel that I had been the cause of *your* suffering."

"I have no reproaches to utter. Within an hour I shall have fulfilled my part of the bargain. Your debts are paid. You are able to get away from this scene of disgrace, and I—in an hour—*I shall belong to myself.*"

The sort of exultation which crept into the girl's voice as she uttered the last words startled Mrs. Montagu. She saw also that Eglantine made a furtive, involuntary movement of her hand towards her breast, as though to assure herself of the safety of something concealed there.

"I have a confession to make, Eglantine, in these last moments we shall have together. You have been just so far. Now, my child, I implore you to be generous."

"Go on," said Eglantine, "the time is exceedingly short."

Again Mrs. Montagu started at her tone.

"If I feared ever so slightly for your perfect honour as Geoffrey Barton's wife, I should not tell you what I am about to tell. But I know you, Eglantine; you would die before you would deviate from your duty."

"Yes, I would die," she said absently.

"So—I will tell you that—Caxton Leigh's neglect — desertion, call it what you will—was due to me."

Eglantine started violently. The warm blood swept over her warm face.

"Before I slept that night, after your return from the theatre I wrote to Caxton Leigh, and put him in possession of all the facts, and in case his own pride and sense of propriety did not lead him to give you up on becoming acquainted with your true situation, *I forbade him to come to my house!*"

"And he obeyed you?"

Eglantine sat upright. The figure of wax seemed turning into a living woman.

"No. He disobeyed me. He made unparalleled efforts to see you—to communicate with you. But the hall-porter was paid to prevent his entrance into my apartments under any circumstances whatever. The letters, too, have passed through my hands, and all his letters were destroyed."

"Why do you tell me this?" said Eglantine, with a shudder.

"To free my own conscience, child; for never in my life before have I wronged a woman—unless it were myself; and, also, that you may feel, in the future, that Leigh believes you gave him up voluntarily. That places

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you on a vantage ground in meeting him in Society hereafter, as you must and will."

A bitter smile crossed Eglantine Villars' fair face.

"I shall never meet Caxton Leigh in this world again," she said.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Montagu excitedly.

Again Eglantine's hand crept towards her bosom.

"In an hour," she repeated, "I shall belong to myself. I shall have fulfilled my contract, and paid my debts. Mr. Barton will have the right to bury me, and no other rights whatever."

"Eglantine!"

Mrs. Montagu uttered the word in a shriek, which mingled with a confusion of voices outside the entrance-door.

With the confusion, the door opened, and two men burst precipitately into the apartment.

"Madam," cried the voice of the house-porter, "I have done my best to prevent Mr. Leigh from entering, according to my orders. I am obliged to announce that the carriage is waiting, and that it is on the point of striking twelve."

Eglantine sprang to her feet.

Tall and fair, in her bridal robes, she confronted Caxton Leigh, who had pushed on into the dressing-room in defiance of orders.

"Eglantine," he said coldly, "I have sworn that this wedding should never take place until I had heard from your own lips that you married of your own will. For your sake I preferred to make the 'scene' here rather than at the church. All I ask is your word that you have not been driven to this through a sense of obligation to Mrs. Montagu."

Eglantine had looked for one moment with beating heart and tender eyes into her lover's face. Her lips were parting.

Suddenly an ashen pallor spread over her lips and brow. She threw her arms forward and slipped fainting to the floor.

A wild scream burst from Mrs. Montagu's lips. All her self-control had vanished.

"Help," she cried. "A physician—quick! Miss Villars has taken poison!"

* * * * *

It was one o'clock. The verger was closing the church, and explaining that Mr. Barton's wedding was postponed, owing to the illness of the bride.

In Mrs. Montagu's drawing-room, Eglantine was slowly recovering from a succession of swoons.

A physician stood with his finger on her pulse, and a small unopened phial, labelled "poison," which had fallen from the bosom of her dress, stood on the dressing-table besides the diamond ornaments as they lay in their velvet case.

Silent and glowering, Caxton Leigh leant against the mantlepiece.

"Eglantine Villars is mine," he had said, in defiance to Geoffrey Barton, who arrived upon the scene to learn the meaning of the delay after his awkward "wait" at the church. "She is mine, and nothing but death shall take her from me."

Mrs. Montagu was gathering up Mr. Barton's gifts, the diamonds, bangles, brooches, which he had lavished upon his promised bride. Lastly, she unlocked a leather bag and a purse from a secret drawer.

"Mr. Barton," she said, "I have been a little false to all. I have money in reserve. I wish to reimburse you for what you have expended in anticipation of marrying Eglantine. If you feel humiliated, so do I. I never attempted to speculate with human hearts before, and I have had enough of it. Take every penny I possess. I can work at something—for my daily bread. I put my past aside from this moment, and begin a new career."

* * * * *

Six months later, one summer day, Miss Villars and Mr. Leigh were quietly married in a village church from the home of Eglantine's aged grandmother, to which she had gone after parting with Mrs. Montagu. And late that same season, from their seats in the dress circle of the New Opera House, the young couple saw Mrs. Montagu, that was, and Mr. Barton enter a private box.

"The rumour was true, then. They are actually married," whispered Caxton to his young wife.

"Yes," said Eglantine, with a little shiver. "See—she has on those very diamonds!"

And she and her husband gave one grateful glance into each other's eyes, and then, calm and smiling, they nodded in recognition to Mr. and Mrs. Barton.

ALICE GRATTON.

An old lady of our acquaintance is so susceptible to cold that she won't even use moist sugar.

At the old curiosity shop. "Have you any old Roman weapons?"

Dealer: "We have none in just now; they are being rusted."

A man may sneer at a woman all he will because she can't sharpen a lead pencil, but she is able to smile at him when he stands holding an unoccupied button in his hand, and wondering if it will hurt less to pull the needle out of his thumb the same way as it went in, or push it on through.

Not long since, a family moved into a village in Kent. After a week or so a friend of the family called on them and asked them how they liked the locality.

"Pretty well."

"Have you called on any of the neighbours yet?"

"No; but I'm going to if there's any more of my coals missing."

The most practical lover has been discovered at Bristol. In one of his letters to his sweetheart he wrote: "I wish, my darling, that you would not write me such long letters. If you were to bring an action for breach of promise against me, the lawyers would copy the correspondence between us and charge fourpence for every folio of seventy-two words. The shorter the letters the more we save from the lawyer." And he was not a lawyer.

Every man to his trade. Yes, and every man thinks of nothing but his trade, and views everything only in its relation to his trade. Have you ever heard of the Irish tailor who went on a visit to Niagara Falls with a friend, and who gazed admiringly at the vast cataract until he was asked:

"Well, Pat, what do you think of it?"

It was some minutes before the little tailor could answer. He looked again and again at the torrent of waters, his mouth open, and his face aglow with enthusiasm. At last he burst out:

"Begorra! begorra! Phwat a lovely place to sponge a coat!"

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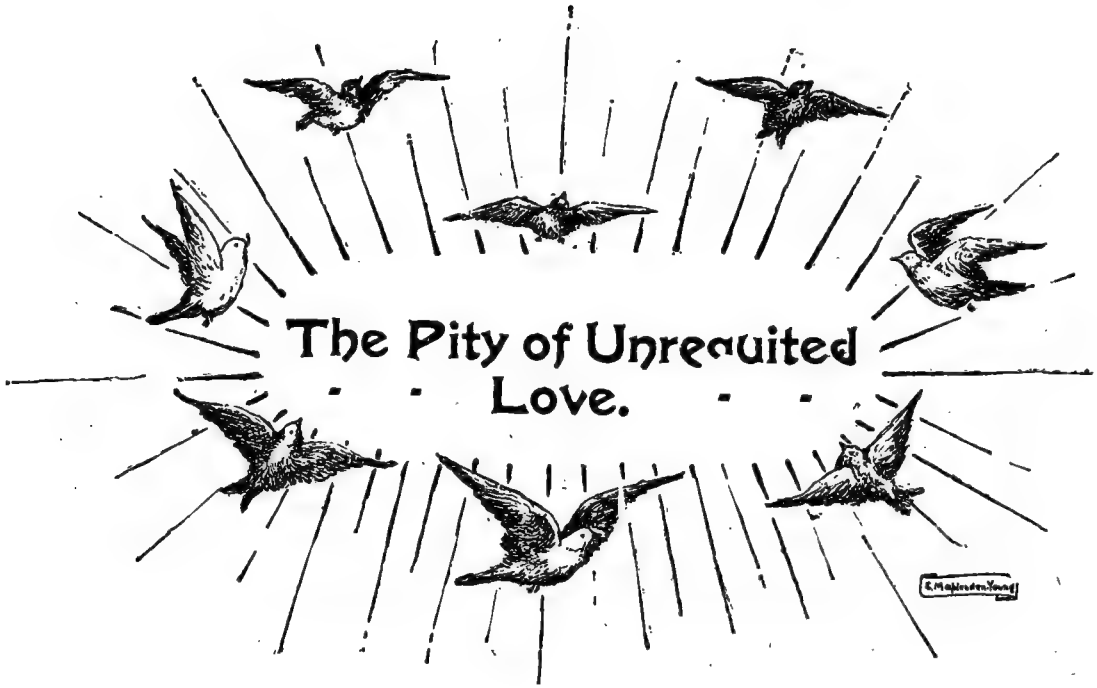

JOHN WATTERSON sat on the edge of his bed in his little bedroom, thinking. The lower drawer of the bureau in front of him within two feet of the bed was open, and in it two or three shirts lay in great disorder, as though tumbled by an impatient hand.

"They're all pretty bad—frayed and worn," said John to himself. "It's a question, though, whether to wear one of them or buy a new one and go without a decent dinner. Let's look again."

He took the shirts out, one after another, examined the bosom of each critically, and threw them in turn on the bed. Then he opened his purse and took out some money.

'Fifteen bob, and it's only the middle of the week," he sighed. "I shall have to buy the new shirt and eat a shilling meal."

He threw the shirts into the drawer.

"If I hadn't sent those flowers this afternoon—" It came over him suddenly how absurd it was for him to buy roses like those. But he remembered the fine sense of luxury he had experienced when buying them—only it was a bit humiliating to have to ask the price beforehand. But they were for her, and he would go without his dinner any time to be able to send her flowers. Still, it was absurd. What a bitter chance of fate it was that had thrown him into well-bred society, where people dressed well and dined well habitually—where he belonged, he felt, by every right, but the possession of filthy lucre. He said "filthy lucre" aloud, and took a certain pleasure in the phrase. Better for him to have lived quietly and known only the people he met every day at his work—and never seen her.

He put on his hat and coat and went downstairs. As he was opening the front door, his landlady entered the hall from the front parlour, and presented him with the bill for his lodging.

"Last week's, Mr. Watterson, you know——"

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Higgins. This Saturday I will settle for last week and this week together. I overlooked it last Saturday, and I haven't the money with me just now. But this week, Saturday——"

"Oh, all right. I thought I'd remind you——"

Watterson had closed the door and was out in the street.

A few minutes later he was sitting in a small restaurant. He could not help noting the meanness of the place, the smoky atmosphere, the cheap pine chairs with cane seats, the thin table linen, and comparing them with the appurtenances of the dinners he had eaten in private houses.

He found a certain pleasure in doing so.

There was a piquant contrast in dining excellently three days a week, and wretchedly the other four.

"Here I am now at half-past six eating in this disgusting place"—he noticed that the man who was sitting opposite him at the table had his napkin tucked under his chin and was eating with his knife—"in two hours I shall be sitting in a beautiful drawing-room, where every object speaks of refinement and luxury, talking with——"

It seemed hideous to think of her in his present surroundings. She did not know he dined, had to dine sometimes, in such places. Would she not be disgusted with him if she knew? The thought took away his appetite. He finished the insipid entree and the sickish pudding as soon as possible, lighted a cigarette to take the taste out of his mouth and hurried out. On his way back to his room he stopped at a shop and bought a shirt.

Sitting on the edge of his bed, he began to argue with himself whether he should go to see her or not. He knew all the time that he would go. He realized that it was dangerous for him to go, that his eyes constantly betrayed his secret—which he knew she knew. Could

he trust his lips not to betray it? Three words might put an end to everything. It was a terrible risk.

He had decided long ago not to tell her, not until he had the right to say more than three words. But suppose—yes, suppose she should care a little—perhaps a great deal— It was possible. He recalled two or three glances, two or three words, soft-spoken at a dance, which were burnt into his memory. The old thrill of them returned. But suppose she should not—what then? Ah, yes, what then? Anyway, he would go to see her that night.

He put on his dress clothes and went out. Half an hour later he climbed the steps of a big house, rang the bell and was admitted.

* * * * *

It was cold and late when he stood again on the steps. The street was deserted. Someone with creaking shoes was walking away in the darkness. Watterson buttoned his coat tightly round him and walked slowly down the steps. Which way should he go? It didn't matter much—he would walk to the street where the trams were.

As he walked along the deserted cross street a perfect calmness came over him.

After all, he was himself, living and breathing, seeing and feeling. It surprised him somewhat that it should be so, but it made his mere physical senses strangely acute.

He noticed how hard the pavement was, how rough the kerb, and he realised a certain pleasure in these keen sensations.

But at the same time it seemed to him that part of himself was absent or asleep—that part of him that really noticed and felt—and that it would come back or wake up to acute sensation—he could not forsee exactly when.

"It can never be."

The words rang suddenly in his ears and stunned him. The street became hazy and indistinct, and at the same time the part of him that really felt seemed to come back or awake.

"It can never be." That part seemed to be repeating like an echo, while he himself stood gazing at the street and seeing nothing.

"I will be calm," he said to himself. "I will walk back and think of something else."

He reached his room in a passive state of mind. "I am not sleepy," he thought, as he laid away his hat and coat.

"I will sit down and read awhile and then go quietly to sleep."

He took off his dress coat, put on an old one, and sat down with a book.

"I am perfectly calm," he said to himself, after finishing two or three pages. "I understand perfectly all I am reading."

He had read half a page further when a snatch of a tune somehow got caught in his head, and kept repeating itself mournfully over and over again.

He struggled to read on.

Always that snatch of a tune. Why? He had never heard it under any circumstances to make him remember it.

And yet there was a certain fitness about it to the present case. He felt that, and he hated the tune for it.

He threw down the book.

"I will go to bed—and to sleep," he said.

In the darkness his thoughts became terribly vivid, almost tangible. And always that snatch of a tune kept repeating itself like a murmur of the orchestra in a theatre when a melodramatic situation occurs.

To-day had been marked different from all other days. Would to-morrow be like the others?

He wondered what it would be like?

"I shall get up as usual and breakfast. Yes I will have some coffee and boiled eggs and some nice French rolls. That will not be so different though. I have eaten that breakfast before. But yes, it will be different—because of to-day."

After breakfast he should go to the office, see the same faces, do the same work, but it would all be different—because of to-day.

"It can never be."

But could it never be? Possibly it could be, years hence. She would marry some brute of a husband who would make her unhappy. Then, after years, she would be free—somehow.

He would be famous, rich, very rich, perhaps, then. She would be poor. They would meet and then it might be. She would be willing then.

But she had said it never could be, and of course it couldn't be then. He should be too reconciled to its not being.

But then it was not because he wasn't rich or famous, it was because she didn't——

He felt something hot and moist on his cheeks. Why, he was crying. He didn't mean to let himself do that. He was glad it was dark. He felt ashamed. At the same time he was angry—angry that anyone should have the power to make him cry. He almost hated her for a moment.

Suddenly, while he was in this mood, the thought of pistols came into his mind. He pictured out what he would do. He would go and shoot *himself* on the doorstep, her doorstep, late at night—no, early in the morning. He saw himself lying there, covered with blood. Somebody opens the door—screams. He is recognised—bah! what nonsense! He wouldn't do anything like that. He would go on living just the same as he had been living.

Again he saw her married to someone who made her unhappy; then free. This time, though, he felt no resentment. He was saying something to her in low tones—the words sounded in his ears as he lay there in his bed, but he could not make out just what they were, and she was looking up with that look:

"It can never be."

Again the words rang in his ears.

"It is all at an end," he said, burying his face in his pillow. "But I love her—I love her—I love her!"

W. S. Evesham.

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A LOVE TRAGEDY.

A Story of Old Mexico.

THE little town of San Carlos, lying in the heart of that vast wilderness of Old Mexico—a tiny patch of green on the face of the sun-scorched earth—seems insignificant to a degree.

Its few fields, bravely struggling against the heat and drought, are but sparsely watered by a little creek which flows from a ravine close by, and which seems to disappear into a thirsty earth a few hundred yards farther on.

San Carlos itself is composed merely of a few houses clustered together round a square little plaza, and the remnants of what had once been a tiny chapel, built hundreds of years before by the old Spanish fathers.

Yet, primitive as was the little town, here Juanita had lived all the happy eighteen years of her life, and here she was contented to stay until she should be laid beside her sleeping grandfathers and great-grandfathers in the little graveyard of the chapel.

She knew nothing of the great world beyond—she never even thought of seeing it. But there was another reason. Her father, old Don Jose, had promised her to the son of his oldest and dearest friend, who had fought with him years before in the war with the hated Americans, and who had been wounded in the battle of Cerro Gordo before the famous old City of Mexico itself.

Now, secretly, this was just what the young people had desired. Pedro and Juanita had grown up together from childhood. They had been constant companions, and were they not the handsomest couple in the whole broad valley? Had not Juanita all her father's lands as her dowry, which, united to those which Pedro owned, would make them the largest landowners in the village?

But now Juanita was sorely troubled.

Everything had gone along smoothly as ever until one day something had happened which bid fair to upset all their plans for the future.

On a certain bright morning, there had ridden up to the door of her father's hut one of a band of men who were prospecting in the mountains that lay over to the west. He was a fine-looking young fellow, and for a man who had been prospecting for two years under the fierce sun of old Mexico he was remarkably fair, and then his blue eyes had a frank expression in them which was far different from the over-suspicious glance which characterised the men of that quaint country.

He wore the usual dress of men of his occupation, loose blue flannel shirt and corduroy trousers tucked in at the top of his heavy boots, a red handkerchief knotted carelessly round his neck, and huge Mexican spurs on his heels.

Juanita had been standing in the little opening on the opposite side of the house, and had not seen him until he was almost beside her, so that it appeared to her as if he must have suddenly sprung from Mother Earth.

Harding had seen her about the same instant she had seen him, and, as he doffed his wide sombrero and asked in imperfect Spanish to see the don, unconsciously his pulse quickened.

Juanita was really a very beautiful Mexican girl, by far the most beautiful creature he had seen during the whole course of his stay in that dismally arid country, and the expression on the girl's face flattered him not a little. Still he had almost forgotten her when he had finished bargaining with her father for provisions for himself and his men, which he did at last succeed in getting on payment of a fabulous sum. When he turned and saw her standing where he had left her, he started and would have spoken had he not felt the piercing little black eyes of Don José fastened upon him.

As it was, the old man detected the start and ordered his daughter hastily into the house.

Ever since that time Juanita's thoughts had been in dire conflict, and late that night when all was quiet in the village she had crept noiselessly into the little chapel, and, kneeling before the time-worn image of the Madonna, had prayed, with tears streaming down her cheeks, that she would direct her and help her to forget.

But far up among the hills on the great range that overlooks San Carlos the prospector was standing alone, whistling softly to himself and gazing down into the wide plain at his feet. Some little distance behind him his companions lay sleeping, and on a flat rock, which answered for a table, someone had overturned the coffee pot and a dark, oozy stream was slowly running down the side.

One of the men moved a little in his sleep. Harding started and looked round at him. Then as the moon rose slowly above the peaks behind him he turned, knocked the ashes from his pipe, wrapped himself up in his blankets, and was soon sleeping soundly.

Nearly a week passed, and the feeling of restlessness which for a time had possessed Juanita had nearly been forgotten, when again Harding rode into San Carlos.

Poor little Juanita! All her attempts to forget him had been in vain then, for as she saw him come into the plaza her heart gave a great bound for joy, and she flushed under her olive skin.

As luck would have it, Don José had gone over to see a friend, and the two fell into conversation. She was shy at first, but the evident ease of her companion finally set her at rest, and when the old don did return they parted the best of friends, and with an understanding that they were to meet again down by the old well hidden in the little ravine outside the town.

After an hour's talk with her father Harding again left the house and, swinging himself into the saddle, rode carelessly away.

A mile or so from the town he made a slight change in the direction he was taking, and so little by little he approached the ravine.

Just as the sun went down Harding reached the well, and, after turning his pony to nibble the juicy blades of grass which grew around it, threw himself down to wait.

He had been there perhaps two or three hours when the bushes were parted gently and Juanita came towards him.

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She had slipped away, she said, while her father and Pedro sat smoking, and had come as she had promised, but she must hurry, for the time was short and her absence would be noticed.

Little by little between questions and promisings, she told him all her brief life history, of Pedro, of her father's wishes, and finally of her own new love for him, and when at last she could say no more she stood looking up at him, her eyes full of the love she had just confessed, until he took her in his arms and kissed her.

At that instant they were startled by a sound behind them. Don José, his face pale with fury, stood scowling at them.

Chokingly, the old man ordered the girl away, and when she was gone he turned to Harding.

"Maledictions upon you," he said, "you shall pay for this!" And disappeared as quickly as he had come.

There was no mistaking that, and the young fellow knew that if he stayed where he was his life would not be worth the waiting. His first fear was for Juanita. Loosening his revolvers in his belt, he mounted his pony and rode slowly towards San Carlos.

Some moments had passed in this way, and he had almost reached the mouth of the ravine, when he saw a figure coming swiftly towards him. An instant later he recognised Juanita. The poor child was almost exhausted from running.

"Go! go!" she sobbed; "they are going to follow you. Don José and Pedro, they will kill you if you stay! Ah, no, not now," she cried, as Harding held out his arms to her, "they will find me here with you and then—" and then, as the impulse seized her, she flung herself into his arms and sobbed as if her heart would break.

She had not been a moment too soon, for even as he spoke the sound of galloping hoofs reached them, as, riding furiously, their two pursuers dashed into the ravine.

With one arm supporting the trembling girl, Harding coolly unslipped his revolver and waited. The Mexicans were within thirty yards before they saw him, and then as they opened fire with their uncertain aim, he slowly raised his own weapon and pressed the trigger.

With a bitter imprecation on his lips one of the men pitched forward from the saddle and fell to the ground. One more shot came from the remaining man before the revolver spoke again, and Harding heard a smothered cry at his side as the riderless horse plunged past him and vanished up the ravine. Then he put up his revolver and turned again to Juanita.

She was strangely quiet as she gazed up into his face and smiled. A quickly-spreading stain over her fair young breast told him the reason at a glance. That last bullet of Don José's had found a mark, and as the shouts of alarm reached them from the village, whither the horse had gone, the light faded slowly from Juanita's eyes and they closed for ever.

For some moments Harding did not move, then he laid her gently down beneath a lonely little willow, kissed once the fair bloodless lips, and mounting his pony rode out of the ravine past the dead bodies of the two Mexicans, and with his head on his breast turned his horse towards the distant mountains.

H. A. Webster.

THE CELESTIAL AND THE CUR.

Locality—A valley in the interior of Queensland, described in the land agent's prospectus as the "loveliest of earth's favoured spots, where mere existence is perpetual delight," but presenting to the unappreciative eye the appearance of a very thinly-populated, treeless and grassless region.

A farmhouse stands some distance back from the public road. The chief advantages of its situation seem to be exclusiveness and open air. A disorderly fence surrounds a front garden, in which Nature blooms unrestrained in thistle and weed.

Enter through the gate, a rotund Chinaman with a very long pigtail. A small dog follows, perforce of a string attached to his collar. The dog, as he approaches the house, wails dolorously and tugs at the cord.

A middle-aged female person rushes out of the front door, grasps the dog, and enfolds him in ecstatic embrace.

She cries out:

"And you are here again, are you? My jewel, my blessed one!"

Hi Chang (serenely smiling): "Yes, me come."

Response (in excited, slightly Hibernian tones): "You think it's you that I'm a-talking to. You, indeed; and you an ignorant heathen. What is it you're meaning by keeping the dog, knowing all the country was being searched for him? Maybe it's starved, he is. Waggy, my own poor dog!"

Waggy wails affirmatively.

Hi Chang (tranquilly): "Me dlive him way, no go; me bling him you this time, next time him come he good-by you." Horribly significant wink of left eye.

Female party (frantically wrought up): "You are not daring to mean you'll kill him?"

Pagan (oracularly): "Velly bad dog, no can all time live. He come my boss place, kill him one day tlee chickee, bleak him leg one duck, and not for eat, for play! You tink my boss buy chickee make play for you dog?"

Volcanic emotion on female visage.

Hi Chang (continues with solemnly warning voice): "My boss say come 'gain te house, maybe so not come any more."

Female (with air of an avenging goddess): "It's an evil man that would take the life of a mite of a senseless beast that's the sole protection of two lonely women. We'll set the law on him."

Hi Chang (placid triumph shining out of his eye-slits): "My boss lich man, do all same he like."

The other party (in haughty scorn): "Rich, and cares so much about a chicken or so? We'll pay for his precious chickens."

Hi Chang (with equally lofty scorn): "He no care chickee, got plenty money buy chickee. He care howl! Dog come make big noise; my boss say, 'kill blank

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beast.' Next time," an impressive pause, "you not see 'gain. Goo'-by." Turns away.

Female (with pursuing shriek of expostulation): "Here, you Chinaman, we'll pay *anything*, tell your boss."

Chinaman (with three unrelenting shakes of head): "No pay for howl!" Closes gate, and trips away, while Odelia makes fierce gestures at his disappearing pigtail.

Languid voice from interior of house: "Odelia, what *is* all the talking and noise?"

Odelia (rushing in direction of voice): "It's our own Waggy that I'm just after taking from the clutches of a murderous-hearted pagan."

Voice within (full of keenest anxiety): "Oh, tell me, tell me, is he safe?"

Odelia (in choking voice): "For this time, yes; but for the next time he goes he's the same as dead. All because of a few chickens." And she crouches in a Niobe pose in the porch near a window.

Voice (through blinds): "But, Odelia, we will pay for any wretched chickens Wagner may kill."

Odelia (despairingly): "And wasn't I telling the sinner just that? And don't he answer me that its the howl his Turk of a master makes a murderous talk about. What's a little noise?"

(Sigh from within): "The poor man may be nervous, may have trouble on his mind—most of us have. But, Odelia, if Wagner *will* go there and make a noise, what *can* we do?"

Odelia (emphatically): "We can make haste to get out of this pagan country, all alive with fiends walking about with pigtails."

(Voice within querulously): "We cannot, Odelia, we cannot. You know that only in a far-off, hidden place like this do I find peace of mind. Bring me Wagner, he understands. I'm never so near forgetting that I'm away from dear old England as when I have him by me."

* * * * *

A farmhouse painted into glaring freshness, general environment indicating recently expended money. A gentleman sits on the porch, his feet on the railing, his hat far down over his eyes. Hi Chang approaches, accompanied by the ubiquitous Waggy, attached as usual to a string.

Hi Chang (addressing soles of feet on railing): "Me catchee him dog one time more."

No response.

Chinaman (in higher key): "This time he kill tlee looster, one little chickee."

Rumbling Voice (under hat): "Feed the beast on chickens, mutton, Durham bulls, Jersey pigs, and other vermin. It's just as profitable a way of disposing of them as any I have found."

Long, reverberating howl from Wagner. Feet on railing come down with a thundering clap.

"Hang the brute!"

Hi Chang (sententiously and approvingly): "All light—hang him light away."

Gentleman tosses a half-smoked cigar aside, and entering the house, partakes of something out of a bottle. He looks at his watch.

"Half-past-four only; thought I'd been scorching on that porch three hours. This is the striving, active life which was to make a new man of me, and choke off all morbid retrospections. The howl of a miserable little cur starts the most insane fancies in my brain. I'd better be moving farther on somewhere—try a South Sea island, or the climatic influences of Kamschatka."

He hears outside an intermingling of pigeon English and canine moans, and he strides to the window, and exclaims:

"By Jupiter! what's the pagan up to? I say, Chang, let the beast alone! Are you idiot enough to suppose I'll let you hang the harmless whelp in full view of my windows, or anywhere else?"

Hi Chang: "No hang him? Well, what must do now?"

The Boss: "Let him go! Keep him out of my sight and hearing. Give him a beefsteak."

* * * * *

Hi Chang at a table chopping hash in time to his favourite melody. He hears approaching steps. He smiles and blinks in response to some idea in his heathen brain.

Continues to chop energetically.

Low, sweet voice at the door: "I am looking for a little lost dog."

Hi Chang (dropping hash-knife as if shot, turns to see a young and handsome lady, who is certainly not Odelia. The pagan, breathless with wonderment, seems about to prostrate himself in Oriental adoration. He speaks in honeyed tones: "Dog b'long you? My, my! me not know b'long you! Me no tink you—me tink *ole* womee. She comes here, talkee heap bad; me talk velly poli', and all time she get more mad."

Lady (sweetly); "Yes. Well, it is my dog, and I have come for him. Perhaps he had lost his way, and somebody here is taking care of him for me?"

Hi Chang (his face one all-illuminating grin): "Yes, lose him way. He come here; he likee stay; he good dog; me fix nice for him. One minnee—me show you."

He vanishes through the inner door, and returns after a short absence.

"You likee come now—me show you."

The lady is conducted up a narrow, dark stairway, which ends in a dim little attic-room. She does not like the look of things at all. Chinaman divines her feeling, and turns to give a reassuring wag of his head.

"All light—you no flaid. Now look see."

He throws open a small door, and reveals a closet of a room, furnished with a Chinese coat on the floor and a plate of food. And there, devouring the food with frightful voracity, is the lost dog.

Lady emotional; Wagner more responsive to hunger than to affection.

Hi Chang (placidly): "You tink me no good to dog? You see nice loom, nice bed; feed him tlee time one day, heap high tone, all samee home."

Voice below singing. Lady starts up with alarmed exclamation. Dog howls.

Voice below: "Where is that howling dervish of a brute? Here, you, Hi Chang!"

Lady (in whisper): "S—h! Waggy!" To Chinaman: "Do—do show me another way down!"

Hi Chang: "No more way. Boss good man; he no mad you."

Waggy's wail continues. Gentleman stamps up the stairway. Lady retreats into the darkest corner.

Gentleman (with ferocity): "Am I to have my house turned into a kennel for this yelping mongrel? Didn't I tell you I must be rid of him?"

Hi Chang (gently): "You tell me feed him cow, sheep chickee——"

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Gentleman begins to give expression to his feelings, but stops, astounded, on seeing a dimly outlined figure in a corner.

Hi Chang (in explanation): "Lady catch him dog."

Gentleman: "You will kindly excuse any violent expressions, madam, but I confess the repeated visits of your dog have been rather annoying to me."

No response. Gentleman irately and curiously approaches figure. He stares, and stares harder; holds his breath, and finally exclaims: "Thunder and Mars! Impossible! Yes, without a doubt!"

Lady (in muffled tones): "I am here only for my dog. I had to come myself to get him. I thought some *kind old farmer* lived here."

She makes a movement to pass the gentleman, who holds out a detaining hand.

"But, Millicent, this extraordinary meeting must be explained."

Millicent (scornfully): "You should know that I *never* make explanations."

Gentleman: "But I was sure you had gone to Iceland."

Millicent: "Yes? You thought yourself sure of a good many things. Who said I was in Iceland?"

Gentleman (subduedly): "No one *said* so; I guessed so, and so came straight away here to the other side of the world."

Millicent (sardonically): "So did I, by an unfortunate coincidence of ideas."

A good deal of animated discussion follows. Hi Chang delicately retires into the small room, keeping one eye fitted to the narrow chink of the door. His reflections: "Me know now what for he so much tlinkee, and likee give dog sheep, bull, chickee. Have big fuss; he go way. He sit down, tink, tink, all samee not plentee womee in world. He heap mad; he likee never more get please. She come; she look velly nicee; he forget one minnee. She no forget; she talk make him solly; womee heap smart; man no can all time find out."

Lady: "You grant that you gave me more than provocation?"

Gentleman (abjectedly): "Yes, you were justified, entirely. But a man can't help the mad things he does when he is jealous."

Millicent (speaking fast): "I don't in the least refer to things you did when you were jealous—if you were so. It was the *real* indignities I suffered through *her*. And, by the way, where is she now?"

Gentleman: "I have not seen her since that hideous week at Goodwood."

Millicent: "Ah! really, how wonderfully, with what fortitude, you endured the horrors of that week. *We* noticed, didn't we, Wagner?"

Gentleman (grappling at diversion): "No wonder that beast's howl was so familiar."

Millicent (languidly): "Wagner we will now leave, and promise Mr. Vandervere not to disturb him again."

Mr. Vandervere (in commotion): "Millicent, you cannot think of breaking off in this cold-blooded way?"

Millicent (sighing): "You seem happy; I—exist at least, in peace and obscurity. A life of solitude and loneliness is not so unendurable as one in which mind and heart are daily tortured."

Hi Chang (sighing responsively): "She get him all likee she want now. She talk heap pity."

Much persuasion and entreaty on one side; reminiscence and reproach on the other.

Millicent (finally, with decision): "You admit, then, that your affair with that person was a disgrace to yourself and a wrong to me?"

Vandervere (expostulating weakly): "But, dear Millicent, in justice to her I could not admit that much."

Millicent (half-way downstairs): "So you prefer to do an injustice to your *wife?* Very well. Consider this meeting merely an accident. We continue apart."

Vandervere (desperately): "No; I know, dearest, I did make a fool of myself, and she was imprudent."

They are now quite downstairs. Hi Chang tip-toes out into vacated hall, grinning and wobbling his chubby neck.

"Wifee heap smart; she say, 'Me do long, what for you make me do?' Then husban' tink he may be so velly bad man." He pensively resumes hash-chopping in kitchen. Enter Odelia tumultuously, making confused exclamations. Hi Chang chops on.

Odelia: "Isn't there a tongue in your head to answer?" Hi Chang swirls round, waving hash-chopper and grinning fiendishly.

Hi Chang (with lightning transformation into grotesque mirth): "Before you lose him dog, now you lose him lady. Evly time lose him something, you come ask me."

Odelia (gurgling with rage): "Oh, it's not me that minds your impudence. It's my lady I'm looking for, and I'll find her or die."

Hi Chang (in a squeaking whisper): "One minee, me show you. My boss catchee him dog, then catch him lady. He take outside, and—" (he makes a few hideously-significant passes with the knife, unpleasantly close to Odelia's throat, smiling a ghastly smile as he does so).

Odelia (with hollow lightness of tone): "And so you're thinking to make a fool of me entirely?"

Hi Chang: "You no b'lieve?" He slides over to window, and gazes round; then, stepping out of door, calls to excited Odelia): "You come, me show you." She follows. Chinaman, still dangling hash-chopper, and stepping cat-like, makes a winding course among the outbuildings. He stops at a small tool-house near the orchard, and flattens himself against the wall, one eye peering round the corner. He beckons to Odelia: "S-sh! no make him noise."

Odelia plants herself against the wall, and thrusts her head out above the Chinaman's.

"In the name of St. Patrick!"

Object of exclamation—two figures side by side on narrow box under apple-tree, a dog stretched across the two laps.

Odelia (after long study of the scene): "It's the live man, and not his ghost. Everything made up, and no separation, after all she's been saying. And me wearing my soul away three months in this pagan land."

Hi Chang (reprovingly): "No make him fuss, spoil evlyting. Velly pletty lady! Me work hard, get money, go back China, catch him wifee, heap fat, littee foot. Tlee hundled dollar wifee! You likee catch him husban'? Me flaid take big money—maybe tlee t'ousan' dollar, eh?"

H. Godstone.

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A NEW DELILAH.

So this was her honeymoon. And here she sat alone at ten o'clock in the evening in the dreary hotel parlour, whose bare walls and shabby furniture had become so detestable. She might have gone with him to the concert. But no, she would never enter that hall again. She had sworn it.

Yet she knew her husband's whole repertory by heart, knew the precise bar in his serenade when he would close his eyes, the passage in his scherzo when he would toss back his hair so gracefully. How studied and unnatural it all seemed! She fancied she could see him now, bowing with a faint smile, as though oppressed by the applause which thundered around him.

Oh, how wildly the audiences here applauded, especially the women. Now they were pressing forward to the stage to shake hands with him. They would wait for him at the exit of the hall to thank him for the great pleasure he had afforded them and throng about him to the very door of the carriage.

It was so yesterday, and the day before, and every day. Mme. Andre felt like crying, especially at the thought of her adventure yesterday, when a crowd of feminine worshippers separated her from her husband, and he, evidently desiring to escape enthusiasm which had become annoying, in the belief that his young wife sat beside him, had driven off without her.

There she had stood, and was forced to hear these women rave about the "gifted man," how handsome he was, the enthralling power of his glance, and, above all, his superb hair.

Yes, his undeniably magnificent locks seemed to please these enthusiasts more than anything else, more even than his skill as an artist.

And the notes he received! She had just read one. Of course, the writer begged for a lock of hair, and he would probably give it to her.

The paper fell from her trembling hands. Her slender fingers clenched convulsively as with compressed lips she sank back into her chair. Oh, their flatteries and cajolery would make him a recreant, a recreant to her and to his art!

She began mentally to enumerate his attractions. The stern expression of her delicate features softened, a tender light stole into her brown eyes. Then, rising nurriedly, she paced up and down the room several times, and her pretty face assumed a very resolute expression.

Surely he would come soon, her Richard, her beloved husband. How had she lived so long without him? It had grown very late. She slipped on an elegant blue silk tea gown, drew the pins from her hair and let it fall in curling locks round her shoulders. Then she turned down the lamp, leant back in the armchair and shut her eyes, as if asleep, and waited for him.

She soon heard his step, the door of the room was thrown open, but on the threshold the tall figure paused, and Andre moved forward on tiptoe.

"Richard, is it you?" asked a voice from the armchair.

"Ah, sweetheart, are you still awake? That is very kind of you." He kissed her. "It has been such an evening, Elly, such an evening!"

Removing his long cloak, he turned up the light. The clear glow fell upon his handsome figure. The regularity of the pale features was rendered more striking by the sparkle of the dark eyes, now glittering with joyous excitement. But the most remarkable thing about his appearance was the long, black hair, which fell in soft, waving locks nearly to the shoulders, giving a striking character to the man's whole person.

He took his seat at his young wife's side.

"Ah, if you would only come with me again, Elly," he said, as he lighted a cigarette. "The enthusiasm, the applause, the flowers! You know I do not set any undue value on such things, but it ought to make you very proud to see your husband so much applauded."

"But it doesn't," she answered with a somewhat forced laugh. "To tell the truth, it makes me feel as if I were quite too insignificant. Besides, dearest, I love in you less the artist, than the husband of my foolish heart, and you are more that at home than in the concert hall."

"You are right. Here I am a man, here I may be, and therefore, you see——"

He gave her a hasty kiss, then slipped out of his dress coat into a comfortable lounge jacket and threw himself down on the sofa, while Elly lighted the lamp under the tea-kettle.

For a time they chatted gaily together. Richard had stretched himself out at full length. Elly sat at the table beside him, and her fingers played at times with his curls.

He was speaking of his programme for the next concert.

"We must continue our journey soon, Elly. I want to drain the cup of success to the dregs. One more like to-day, and—oh, oh, Elly," he suddenly exclaimed, rather crossly, "what are you doing? You have certainly pulled out some of my hair."

"Why, my dear husband—"

"Yes, you have. See, there are at least a dozen."

He raised his head and looked at her reproachfully.

"Why, Elly," he said, "what is the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing, Richard," she replied, smiling as she endeavoured to hide the strange excitement which had taken possession of her. "But perhaps you have forgotten that during our engagement you promised me a lock of your hair?"

"And because I haven't kept my word you want to pull out hairs enough, one by one, to make a lock? You are certainly one of the most affectionate wives that can be imagined."

"Oh, no. If I really pulled it a little, it was purely accidental. Perhaps I moved my hand rather quickly, because I was vexed by the thought that you had not kept your promise. Yes, that was it."

"At that time, sweetheart, there was no travelling. I was with you, with all my hair. So you needed no memento."

"All the same, you didn't keep your promise, and I don't like it a bit, especially as you have been kinder to total strangers. Let me cut off the lock now, please. May I?"

"But, little wife, consider the season of the year."

"Only one little lock, Richard, where you can't miss it."

A pair of scissors glittered in her hand.

"May I?"

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Her voice trembled.

"Oh, I don't care, Elly. But—"

Her agitated face vanished an instant amid his dark curls. He felt a kiss pressed on them, then heard a hissing noise.

"For goodness sake, Elly, in front on my forehead! And so much? Good Heavens!"

He rushed towards the mirror, but the room suddenly became perfectly dark. His wife had put out the light. Two soft arms clasped him round the neck, and Elly, leaning her head upon his breast, began to cry like a child that knows it has done wrong and deserves punishment.

Richard could not understand the violence of his little wife's grief, but when she begged so wildly for his forgiveness for what she had done, he smilingly granted the pardon.

* * * * *

The bright morning sun shone into the room.

"Disfigured; I am utterly disfigured. How could you do it?"

Richard turned angrily from the mirror and seized his hat and cane.

"Good-bye!" he called loudly, to wake his wife, who was still asleep. She started up.

"Where are you going so early, Richard?"

"To the barber to have my hair cut." His voice sounded actually threatening.

"Richard, my dear husband, you see, I wanted—" Then, conscious of guilt, she paused.

"Ah! So you meant to do it!"

He placed himself where the light streamed full upon him, took off his hat and stared at her.

Elly was startled at her own work. From his forehead to the right temple a clump of hair stood stiffly up, giving Richard's angry expression a somewhat comical aspect.

He rushed out of the room, while his young wife murmured amid her tears: "Perhaps he won't forgive me; but it could not be helped"

* * * * *

The first part of the programme was over. During the pause the great concert hall began to fill, for now Richard Andre was to play. His admirers poured in and took their places in the front row. As if by an electric shock the thrill of expectation was communicated to the rest of the audience, which so far had been somewhat apathetic, only the pause lasted somewhat too long, longer than usual.

At last the artist appeared on the stage and was greeted by thunders of applause. Several bouquets flew through the air and fell at his feet.

But the enthusiasm soon died away. The hands which had clapped so madly suddenly paused. A strange murmur ran through the hall. People cast inquiring glances at one another.

This was not the artist whose personal beauty had been so remarkable, but a very ordinary man, in no way different from thousands of others. Why, he looked almost ridiculous, for his clipped hair stood up like bristles all over his head!

Richard bowed his thanks for the enthusiastic reception, whose abrupt close somewhat vexed him. Then, as he again stood erect and placed the violin on his breast, he made the movement of the head with which he had formerly shaken his hair back from his brow.

During the first few bars of the music he noticed the uneasiness in the hall and felt somewhat embarrassed by it. Then he became absorbed in playing and heard only the exquisite notes which he lured from his instrument. "He surpasses himself," the connoisseurs and critics whispered, while the orchestra and conductor gazed as though enchanted at the great musician, who had forgotten himself and his surroundings.

When the piece was over, Richard once more became conscious of his surroundings and stood waiting for the customary response from the audience. Here and there were tokens of approval, but the majority remained strangely indifferent. This state of affairs continued until the close of the performance.

"He looks not only hideous, but ridiculous," whispered a lady just in front of the stage to her neighbour.

"Yes, what induced him to do such a thing? He looks like a convict, or a clown. And those ears!"

"He has forgotten his wig," said a third.

Andre heard the remarks, as the exasperated ladies probably intended, and with his vanity deeply wounded he left the scene of his former triumphs. His music was no longer appreciated. He had become an object of ridicule. And he owed all this to Elly, his foolish, jealous wife.

He clenched his teeth, and his face flushed. She should pay for it.

* * * * *

Richard had not noticed that Elly had entered the carriage with him. He was thinking solely of the humiliation he had suffered—he, who had played like a demigod.

Elly had leant timidly back into a corner and was crying. Whenever the lamps of a passing carriage cast a ray of light into theirs she gazed anxiously into the face of her husband, who sat staring into vacancy. She would rather have endured anything, reproaches, even his contempt, but Richard's silence oppressed her too heavily.

How wretched he must be, the proud artist, so accustomed to the incense of applause!

"Richard," she whispered pleadingly at last, "forgive me. I know I have been very wrong."

He made no reply.

"Just one word, Richard," she sobbed bitterly, "just one. You see—the notes you gave me to read—all asked for locks of hair, till at last they drove me wild."

"To think that you should have been there, Elly," he muttered, "at this concert!"

"Oh, how I suffered for you!" she cried.

"How they treated me!" he burst forth, clenching his hands. "And why? It's incredible, but true! Because—I had had my hair cut!"

"Yes, Richard, and the favour of such people was your pride, your glory! What do they know of your art? And you played magnificently to-night. I knew it; I can value you, even without your hair!"

Richard again lapsed into silence. But suddenly, before the carriage stopped at the hotel, he threw his arms round her, clasping her passionately to him.

"Elly," he gasped, "you are right! I have learnt it now. The lesson hurts, but it has cured me. Such external vanities are unworthy of a true artist. I owe this recognition to you, my new Delilah, and—and from this day my hair shall stay as it is now."

Again the light from a passing carriage shone upon Elly's face, and Richard saw that she was smiling roguishly through her tears.

"Listen, Richard," she whispered, "we will let it grow again! There is no danger now, for you or me, and, with your long hair, dearest—you certainly are a handsomer man."

F. Germaine.

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THE DISCOMFITURE OF THE DUCHESS.

MRS. CONIGSBY was bewildered, and for a moment hesitated, then, with a bow to her companion, and a murmured excuse that she must find her husband, she walked towards a large marquee on the lawn.

With a look of surprised admiration Lord Harry watched her retreating figure and then left the summer-house, where he had been chatting with Mrs. Conigsby, and joined a group of ladies who were drinking tea and discussing their neighbours' shortcomings. The occasion was the village show held in the Rectory garden under the distinguished patronage of Her Grace the Duchess of Porcastle.

Mrs. Conigsby, a bride of two months, had been persuaded by her husband to come to the show, though she had only been at home a week and knew none of her neighbours. Fortunately, she met in Lord Harry an old acquaintance, and the two had been discussing old times and mutual friends when the Duchess, Lord Harry's stepmother, with some of her bosom companions, sat down on a seat at the side of the summerhouse out of sight but not of sound.

"A very ordinary little person, I can't think what he saw in her," one lady said, evidently resuming a discussion.

"About the plainest woman I have ever seen," declared another, "knows how to dress though."

"A woman of no family and doubtful antecedents."

"Cecil Conigsby has made a fool of himself," was the verdict of the Duchess. Half an hour before this same lady had expressed herself as "so charmed to meet Cecil's wife," but that was because Cecil was standing by, and he could have told some unpleasant things about her which she would far rather remained secret.

Lord Harry joined the group, and after a friendly greeting remarked that he had just had the pleasure of renewing an old acquaintanceship.

"I met Mrs. Conigsby at Nice two years ago."

"One meets all sorts of people at Nice," sneered Her Grace.

Lord Harry smiled.

"Nevertheless, I hope you will allow me to accompany you when you call upon her to-morrow," he replied.

The Duchess frowned and opened her lips to remonstrate, but, thinking better, she answered coldly, "Oh, certainly."

"After all," said Mrs. Nugget later to a friend, "we will have to call."

And so through the agency of Lord Harry "the county" called on Mrs. Conigsby, but that lady's cold reception of them jarred very considerably, for "the woman of no family" (for who had ever heard of the Kitcheners?) had plenty of pride.

Agnes Conigsby had led a lonely life since her step-brother, Charles Faudell, had left the country six years ago. When their mother died Charles found himself sole guardian of this plain, studious child. It had been no light task to look after such a fortune as was hers, and as he was a careless and gay young man, consequently, the love between them was not great.

Six years ago there came into his life the cause of his undoing. He fell in love with the beautiful Constance Fane. Like most visitors at Nice, Charles Faudell spent the greater part of his time at Monte Carlo, and one day, while watching the players round the roulette table he was struck by the keen and excited look on a face, which, but for the too obvious signs of the gambling fever, would have been lovely.

After losing the pile of gold and notes at her side, the young lady rose from the table and gloomily rejoined a party of friends.

With the hope of seeing her again Charles returned to the Casino the next afternoon. She was there again, this time apparently winning. Later on in the day he procured an introduction at the theatre. Their acquaintanceship soon ripened into something much deeper on Charles's part, he became her devoted slave, and as such she treated him.

About a fortnight later Charles accompanied her to the Casino, and left her at the same table where he had first seen her and where, she declared, she intended to win back all her losses.

On returning to his hotel he found a note from Constance bidding him to come to the Hotel de l'Europe at once, as she wished to speak to him on urgent business.

He found her in her brother's sitting-room looking pale and haggard.

"I've lost all," she exclaimed, "all, more than all, you must save me. I must have money at once! The Count threatens to tell my brother, unless I pay him or fulfil my pledge."

"Tell Sir John what? You are speaking in conundrums. He knew you played, what is this other sin, Constance?"

The girl looked at him with wild eyes.

"Lend me the money," she sobbed. "Oh! save me, from the count. My brother will turn me out of doors."

"The Count, you mean that waiter fellow there, what of him?"

"He lent me money, and unless I pay him or—or marry him—"

"Marry him, marry that buffoon!"

"Marry him or pay him £1,000," she answered.

"And you come to me, whom you have so cruelly deceived, to help you?"

"Oh, spare me! Save me from his clutches!"

"I really haven't the money, you must go to your brother, it is his business," and so he left her.

When the first spasm of indignation had spent itself, more generous feelings prevailed. He remembered only her pleading looks and the love he bore her. He forgot her sin, her gross deception. He could only help her by getting money from England, so he sent the following message to his sister:—

To AGNES KITCHENER.
Please forward as much money as possible, immediately.
CHARLES.

Agnes was naturally alarmed. Being at her wits' end she had recourse to the family solicitor, and as the result of her visit she started for Nice without delay, with visions of her brother in the hands of the money lenders.

In the meantime, there had been more trouble in the Hotel de l'Europe. A cheque for £1,000 signed with Sir John Fane's name had been presented at the Crédit Lyonnaise. It was soon discovered to be a forgery. Sir John was furious. Himself an austere and upright man, a crime such as this seemed unpardonable in his eyes.

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He personally followed up every clue to the forger, but so far without success.

When Agnes arrived she found Charles in a fearful state of despondency; he made a clean breast of the whole story, telling her of his love for Constance Fane, her losses at the table, her unholy bargain with the Count, and, finally, the history of the forged cheque.

"She did it, Agnes, she forged the cheque. Great Heavens! how can I help her?"

"Don't! Let her take the consequences," cried the girl vehemently, "she has only herself to blame, let her marry this waiter, she must have known what sort of a man he was."

"Stop please, you don't understand, Agnes. I love her, and if she were as black as Jezebel I would give my life to save her name from being dragged in the dust. And you must help me. To-morrow I shall leave Europe. No, don't try to prevent me. It's no use, I have made up my mind; I shall write to Sir John to-night and tell him my losses at the tables had made me desperate, and that I took advantage of his absence to abstract his cheque-book and forge his name. You will send him the letter after I have gone."

In spite of all Agnes' remonstrances Charles persisted in carrying out this deep laid plot to save Constance's honour at the expense of his own, and so it came about that he left Europe. Constance Fane accepted his sacrifice in silence, and three months later married the old Duke of Porcastle.

Agnes' indignation knew no bounds, but her lips were sealed. She felt terribly lonely and helpless, everything seemed black. Her brother, an outcast, herself ostensibly snubbed by her former friends. Life had reached its lowest ebb in her estimation, but the meeting with Cecil Conigsby meant the turn of the tide. Each day the waves of happiness crept higher and higher; for she loved him as only a woman who had suffered could love; and on the man's side, what had he to give her in return? Admiration may be, but not love. She had mistaken the signs, it was a blissful ignorance at first, but the rude awakening was yet to come. The little cloud was there, and it was growing. Because she had no family connections to boast about she must be a nobody in the eyes of the neighbouring gentry, and because she was necessarily reticent about her former life she was considered stiff and uninteresting. Even her wealth did not help her, for Cecil took care that no one should say that *he* had married her for money.

The Duchess was not at all pleased, she disliked Mrs. Conigsby before she ever set eyes upon the little minx who had had the audacity to marry a man whom she considered her particular slave; and because there was a likelihood of losing him, he at once became an object of greater value and more worthy of attention on her part. Consequently, time after time Agnes found herself alone, and growing morbid and restless.

Cecil was at the Castle or out shooting with the Castle party; he seemed to care less and less about his wife, for he could only love where all the world admired.

There was to be a large house party at the Castle and a fête, to which the aristocracy of the neighbourhood were invited.

Agnes received a card of invitation to the latter with her name only on it. This she took in some surprise to her husband; he appeared embarrassed, but at length managed to blurt out somewhat apologetically.

"The fact is, Agnes, the Duchess has been kind enough to invite me to join the house party."

"What!" she exclaimed, turning pale with anger, "she has asked you without me, I don't understand."

"It is simple enough, they have all the ladies they want, and to tell the truth, the Duchess was quite right in saying what she did. She meant it very kindly, purely out of consideration for you, but you know, Agnes, you would not go down with the rest of the party."

His wife looked at him with flashing eyes.

"In fact," she said, "I am not good enough for them and for you."

"No, no, my dear girl, how you do rush on. Constance would never say such a thing, but the card playing and the—"

"Don't trouble to find excuses, I quite understand," and the expression of her firm mouth showed that the insult had gone too far to be forgiven easily.

Agnes was no saint. While yet she was boiling over with anger she went to the study, and began to put down all the details of her brother's confession, that she might see how his sacrifice appeared in black and white. Perhaps she had exaggerated its virtue, perhaps it was a matter of no importance that this woman had trodden him down and was now trying to destroy her life too.

As she put the confession down on paper an idea came to her. She would write the story in the form of a novel, she could do it, she knew; she had the power now that she was roused. Without loss of time she began, altering all names but leaving facts and descriptions true to life. She was soon absorbed in her work, how her pen ran on, how vividly she depicted the scene of the Duchess at the gaming table, overcome by her desire for money. Who could not recognise the lovely, contorted face as described by Agnes! "Revenge is sweet indeed," mused Agnes, when at the end of a fortnight her task was completed.

Should all the publishers refuse it she would publish it herself, but a better fate was in store for her than that. Standing on its merits the book was excellent, the style clear and concise, and the story interesting. One of the leading firms of publishers took it at once, and Agnes eagerly awaited the day of publication.

In her state of nervous excitement it was impossible for her to remain at home, the issue at stake was too great. What would Charles think of her conduct? But she must not think of that, at all costs she must expose this woman before whom all bowed down, destroy Cecil's infatuation for her.

She therefore visited her old home in the north and did not return home until after the book was published and had begun to be talked about. She had sent Cecil a review copy, his surprise and consternation were great. There was no doubt in his mind who was the real heroine of the story; the Duchess betrayed herself completely.

Royalty had come and gone, and still Cecil was at the Castle, but the talk consequent on the publishing of the book drove the Duchess out of the country. She was routed completely, her anger was only equalled by her dismay.

All at once Agnes found herself a woman of fame, and as a celebrity she began to take her rightful position in the county. Now that the world had found out the merits of his wife, Cecil began to do so too.

"Was it love?" Agnes asked herself at times when he would seek her society and pay her loverlike attentions, "the love of such a man is not worth while having really, but there," and she would smile as she kissed him, "he is my husband."

R. E.

That Strange Affair of Alwood's!

I KNOW there is much in this strange, brief story which will be scoffed at and doubted. No matter! Such minor details do not count in the least. I mean to keep straight to the facts, and write down here just what occurred exactly, as best I can remember.

It all happened in that far away land some people speak of as Burma, where the phoongyees and pogodas are, and the tamarinds.

Alwood voted this Burma one of the finest countries in the world. He liked the eternal drowsy quiet of it, the never-ending peace. But that was before the trouble had fallen. Afterwards, ah, afterwards, it was a curiously different business!

You may wonder, perhaps, how I came to know each startling, bewildering incident of that strange affair of Alwood's! The explanation is easy, and readily given. We were chums—with one of those big friendships between us that only Burma can bring about—and sanctions as something almost holy.

Therefore, I was with him through it all, and knew.

He could hide nothing from me—he ceased to try. And when, one lonely evening, I realised the horrible truth, my brain fairly reeled, the utter consternation of it, the miserable, harrowing fear!

Alwood's mind was being tampered with in some uncanny, baffling, diabolical way! But how? Why? Wherefore? These questions gave me much groundwork for honest reflection. The answers, though, were far to seek, and seemed impossible.

At first the doctors said he had developed a "Burma head," and ought to go home. That was the uttermost they could do for him. The rest was left to me. Burma head, indeed! I can laugh now at the cheerful absurdity of it. Alwood's affair was no Burma head! Then what? And whither was it tending?

The first real change I noticed was late one night. We had been together to see the burning of a phoongyee and stayed on for the poey. Alwood delighted in these strange customs of this quaint land of the Golden Foot. He even hoped to make a book thereon, when he had taken his pension and quietly settled down in the years to come. If ever that book does see the light, I wonder if it will contain an account of what I am writing here? Hardly, I fancy. Alwood would not be equal to the task.

I well remember that night—the night of the phoongyee burning, I mean, after we had returned to the bungalow we shared in common.

The moon was shedding a clear, transparent light everywhere. From the Burmese bazaar came the perpetual music of the tom-tom, borne to us faintly enough, but very distinctly. And the sound, too, of weird incantations droned forth with odd, persistent monotony. It was the poey still going ahead.

We had some dinner on the verandah—Alwood and I. My companion talked but little, for a wonder. He was thinking, doubtless—and listening. When the meal was over I rose and went to my room. Returning quite two hours later I found Alwood just where I had left him—his eyes fixed with a peculiar, fascinating stare on a small, squat, golden image of Buddha Gautama, reposing magnanimously on the table before him.

He did not speak.

This puzzled me. I sat down in absolute silence, waiting. At last his lips moved, and he said something in a voice that might hardly have belonged to him.

"The—second—reincarnation—" he muttered slowly.

I laughed heartily at the tragedy in his tone of manner.

"Esoteric Buddhism again, old chap," I asked, "or brandy pawnee?"

His gaze on the brazen image never flinched. "The—second—reincarnation—is—"

"The devil!" I interrupted grimly.

"Yes, I believe it all, my friend. I am a Buddhist," he muttered on.

"It must have been the whisky," I concluded. "Haven't tasted it yet, myself. But, by Jove, if that mess sergeant has tricked us again, I'll find an effective means of being even with him!"

Suddenly Alwood's queer mood changed. He became more like his usual self. He started and looked at me questioningly. "What's the matter, old boy?" he asked vaguely. "I've been dreaming."

"Yes," I answered laconically. "You've been dreaming."

"Well, it's a night to dream. What a country this is, old fellow!"

Mannerly was addressing himself to Alwood now. Evidently they had met before. And never till my dying day will I forget the gaze Alwood fixed on the other. Small wonder he grew whiter and whiter with such eyes as those staring steadily into his! Yes, these two had met before. My brain was in a whirl, the new thoughts flooded in so rapidly. Where would it all end, I wondered. And when?

My fierce determination was taken—to fathom, if possible, and soon, the weird, strange business.

"Miss Brierwood," I said to the little girl my chum had always loved, "did this Mannerly and our Alwood know each other intimately before they met here?"

"Oh, yes," she answered uneasily, "but they were never friendly. Mr. Mannerly is a dangerous man if anyone tries to thwart him."

"I felt you believed that all along, Miss Brierwood," I blurted out, with more candour than gallantry. "Then why are you allowing yourself to be drawn into an engagement with him?"

"An engagement?" she echoed wearily.

"Yes," I answered warmly. "It is leading to it. Everyone can see. You were acquainted with him before either of you came to this station—but the way he monopolises you speaks of much more than mere acquaintance—aye, even friendship. He looks upon you as his own—you who in reality belong to poor old Alwood. Why will you not have patience a little, and wait till Jack is better?"

"You have no right to talk to me like this!" she flashed indignantly. Then her mood changed.

"Ah, if only I could, I would wait till the end of my life," she murmured quietly. "But it is not possible.

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Mr. Mannerly wants to marry me. You don't know that man, Mr. Whitely!"

"No—then, by Heaven, I will!" I exclaimed passionately. "He has worked mischief enough already! His game is well-nigh over!"

* * * * *

I have said that much in this strange, brief story will be scoffed at and doubted. I have no explanation to offer. My plan was to stick to facts all through and leave the rest. It has been a steadfast purpose, and wonderfully concentrated. How useless to attempt anything further. The story I have told truthfully, diligently. The explanation must come from elsewhere. I am powerless.

Therefore, I return to plain facts again, and hand over the probable solution to others.

It was late one evening when I was nearing our bungalow, late after the paperchase of the afternoon, and the billiard tournament in the mess. To-morrow Miss Brierwood and Mannerly were to be married, a quiet little wedding, with no bridal ceremony whatever.

I was hot against it, because of poor old Alwood. Mannerly laughed lightly at my vehemence. He did not care in the least that he was robbing another fellow of his love. The other fellow was mad. No one heeded him now.

Mad! Ha, ha! It was a capital notion! A peculiar madness, truly! My mind—in a tumult—was running on these things as I reached the bungalow. I was angry with myself that the mystery remained a mystery still—that I had not been able to prevent this hateful marriage on the morrow.

Ah! What was that? The sounds of loud talking and scuffling! I paused on the wooden steps leading to the verandah. Alwood's tones were wild and excited—Mannerly's came at uncertain intervals, faint and stifling.

A few seconds later, and I had hurried to the spot.

Alwood—towering high above Mannerly—held him fixed by the throat, yelling into his ear some insanely improbable story, as it seemed to me then.

To my further astonishment I now caught sight of Ellman, the native doctor. He was sitting looking on, a serene smile of contentment playing about the angles of his intelligent features.

"What is it?" I gasped. "There'll be murder!"

"They're right enough," he answered contentedly. "Mannerly deserves all that, and more. I hope he'll get it, the English devil!"

"Will you explain, Ellman?" I demanded, with desperate quiet.

"Presently," he answered. "After that brute has had his deserts."

But I was not with the doctor there. I could see that the affair had already gone too far. I separated them as quickly as possible.

"I meant to kill him," Alwood said slowly, and for the first time in many, many weeks, he was his own, true self.

"I meant to kill him," he repeated. "But let him go, the cur! He has played old Harry with me, Whitely. Our friend Ellman, here, will tell you the whole story. It was he who saved me from that living hell!"

I looked from one to the other.

"The story!" I said hastily, appealing to Ellman in my eager excitement and wonder.

"The point is," he answered tersely, "whether that English devil remains here to recount his part of the narrative or disappears at once."

"Let him go," Alwood put in steadily. "The sight of the coward sickens me."

He slunk off, and from that day to this I have never set eyes on him again, nor has Alwood. Let him thank his stars for that, wherever he may be.

"I must make the story necessarily very brief," Ellman continued, when we three were alone.

"On my way down to Rangoon, after I had met you that night at Moran's, I rehearsed in my mind repeatedly the symptoms of your friend. I had an idea, for the symptoms were not new to me.

"I went to see a great phoongyee—my particular aquaintance. He is a most marvellous man—next, I think, to the Great Lama himself.

"A saintly man, the phoongyee—and a mighty intellect. I had long talks with him, and spoke of this poor fellow here. He looked grave, the phoongyee. 'You know what it is?' I asked, in our own language, of course—Burmese. The phoongyee cannot speak English at all. I have spoken it from the cradle.

"'Yes, I know what it is,' he made me answer. 'When you go back to your station, I also go. My people up there are glad when I visit them.'

"On the flotilla, coming here, he completed the history. Once when he was merely a boy in one of the monasteries of the Grand Lama, a wandering soul gave him a go den image of the Great One, the Buddha. It was a holy thing to him—his very life. Burmese and phoongyees, remember, hold faithfully by the doctrine of the reincarnation. My phoongyee friend believed that the golden Buddha came to him from the very friend of Buddha himself, and the Grand Lama.

"You follow me, my friends?" he broke off, at this point.

We nodded.

"Well, one day, when the phoongyee had long been a priest, and was still languishing in the monastery of the Grand Lama, an Englishman came and stole his golden Buddha. The phoongyee cursed him by Buddha and the Lama, with a curse that is known fortunately to but few of my people. It would damn the possessor to misery and complete forgetfulness, an illness of the mind that would baffle the whole medical world.

"The brute, Mannerly, found this out very quickly to his cost, so he buried the golden Buddha. A year or so later he met the little white girl over there, Miss Brierwood, and loved her as you Englishmen will love always. But there was another, our mutual friend Alwood. It was here that Mannerly wove his plan. He resurrected the golden Buddha, and sent it to his rival, and the curse with it.

"Everything prospered with the English devil. He was to be married to-morrow at the little English church yonder. Ha, ha! And now he is gone from our sight! Ha, ha! My phoongyee friend came here quietly, and his inner spiritual craving led him direct to the spot where his long lost Buddha reposed. He has taken it away with him. He is pleased once more. And ere he went he unweaved the spell of his curse. Our friend Alwood is better. Have I properly explained?"

"Man alive," I cried testily, "it's the uncanniest thing I ever heard!"

Ellman smiled picturesquely. "All things are possible to the phoongyees of my country," he said mysteriously, and left us.

* * * * *

I have written it. Farewell!

H. G. L.

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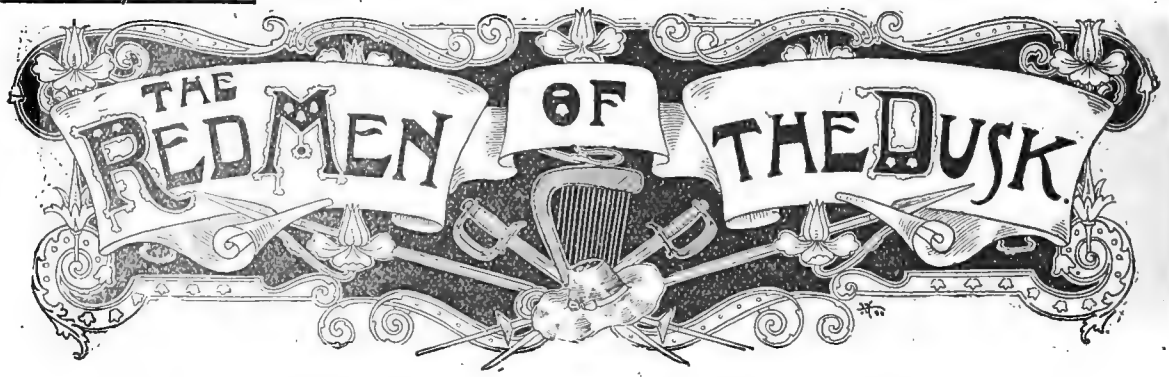
SIXTH INSTALMENT.



A Romance of the Seventeenth Century.

BY JOHN FINNEMORE.

SUMMARY.

GEOFFREY HEATHCOTE, who, for political reasons, is apprehensive of pursuit, leaves Butley Croft, in Worcestershire, and makes for the heart of Wales, where he has expectations of finding a sure refuge. Travelling among the Welsh mountains, Geoffrey narrowly escapes being trapped by a gang of thieves, and on a later occasion he joins in a fight against the same gang. Geoffrey then falls into the company of a hot-headed Welshman, who picks a quarrel. They fight, and Geoffrey, who has found more than his match, is saved by a woman, who is grateful to the refugee for having saved the life of her child. Suspicious characters gather round Geoffrey. Being mounted on a superior horse the refugee easily shakes off his wretched companions, and at a later period assists two ladies in escaping from a band of thieves. Geoffrey is hospitably entertained by a Welsh farmer, and on resuming this journey he encounters a handsomely dressed Welshman. The latter upbraids the English, and they fight with swords. At a critical moment the duel is stopped by the young girl whom Geoffrey had assisted, and who turns out to be no other than his own cousin. The refugee is welcomed by his uncle, with whom he stops. Geoffrey and his cousins Enid and Owain set out on an errand of mercy and are chased by "The Red Men," who attack the house and are ultimately repulsed. Geoffrey, who goes in pursuit of them, is shot in the head from the house, and suspects his uncle of the deed. Six Red Men are captured and hanged, and Geoffrey incurs the hatred of his uncle's menials by pleading for their lives. The place becomes dangerous to him, and he leaves. Meanwhile, his uncle has extracted from his secret pocket an incriminating letter, with which he sends one of his men to the authorities. The man, however, is captured by Geoffrey and Ieuan Gwyllt.

CHAPTER XV.

I BECOME A MAN OF THE DUSK.

I FOLLOWED in his steps for I could not see what else to do. The whole affair was on my account; the man was, in a sense, my prisoner, and I felt responsible for him. The discovery of the dreadful advantage which Sir Arthur held over my friends had turned my plans topsy-turvy, and I could scarcely ride away to a safe place of refuge with the knowledge that their liberties and lives were hanging in the wind.

"You will follow very carefully," said Ieuan over his shoulder, "for there will be places where to go a foot wrong, will be to slip into a bog where you will sink as a stone sinks in water."

Upon this caution, I came down, and led Whitesock close at the tail of the messenger's horse. At first the path was hard and clean, then we travelled for a long way through places where the frost had not yet gained a complete grip of the marshy track, and, crashing through the stiffened surface, we sank half-knee deep at every step. Being unused to such places my heart was in my mouth time and again, and especially when the surface of the bog for a score of yards round quaked and swayed and seemed to suck at us as if eager to engulf us between its sedgy lips.

But Ieuan trod firmly and steadily on, and I followed and within an hour we came out on the smooth, hard hill side, Ieuan now sprang up behind Gruffydd and took the reins, urging the powerful horse to a trot, and I swung myself into the saddle and rode alongside.

As I came up, the prisoner turned a sullen eye upon me, and I saw fear and surprise mingled in his glance.

"Tell him not to be frightened," said I, "he will not come to any further harm."

Ieuan gave a chuckle of dry contempt and shrugged his shoulders slightly. He spoke never a word, and I was the more strongly fortified in my resolution to see the thing through, and do what I could to keep safe a man who was only an innocent instrument in the mischief intended to me.

Mile after mile we trotted over the bare, bleak hills, and wilder and wilder grew the scene around us. At last Ieuan drew rein at the mouth of a narrow *cwm* whose entrance was littered by great rocks, and began to bark like a fox. He was answered instantly, and two fellows sprang from their hiding-places among the boulders and ran to meet us. At a word from Ieuan, each of them took a rein and guided the horses through a narrow path which wound among the masses of stone and led to a smooth patch of green sward set round on three sides by beetling precipices.

One of these latter lay full in the moonlight, and towards it our horses were led. A dozen yards from the grey rock our guides stood still, and Ieuan made a sign that I should dismount. I did so, and at a command from their leader, the two attendants pulled Gruffydd down in a very unceremonious fashion, and held him by the collar.

"Come this way," said Ieuan.

"What about my mare?" I returned.

"Bring her with you if you like," said Ieuan, and I led Whitesock after him.

I now saw that a huge fragment of rock lay at the base of the cliff, but being of the same colour, and leaving but a narrow gap, it looked even when close at hand a mere projection rather than a separate mass. The path between the boulder and the cliff admitted but a single passenger, and we walked in file, my stirrups jingling against the rock on either hand as Whitesock stepped cautiously after me. A black hole, barely the height of a man, received us, and sand crunched under our feet. A red dancing gleam struck into my eyes, and I saw a great fire of turf burning high and painting the wet, shiny walls of a large cavern with bright, mirror-like reflections. Half-a-dozen figures who had been seated round the blaze sprang to their feet as we entered, but sank down again when they recognised Ieuan.

Low strains of the most mournful music hummed through the place, and I saw the dwarf harper bending over his instrument and drawing from it a wailing, melancholy air.

A woman huddled near him in a crouching heap continued to utter low, heart-broken groans, fitting accompaniment to his music. From two or three bundles laid against the further wall, and covered with skins and tattered rags, cries of pain occasionally burst forth, betraying the presence of the wounded, and I saw myself, at a bound, transferred to the centre and stronghold of the Red Men of the Dusk.

Without a word to anyone, Ieuan walked up to the fire and spread his hands to the warmth. Fierce, curious eyes were turned upon me, and savage cries of rage were uttered as the prisoner was brought forward. His teeth rattled together in fear as he was dragged into the firelight. Ieuan looked upon his terror and their hate with a complacent grin. At this instant the woman, whose groans of sorrow had been echoing through the place, was aroused from her torpor by the excitement of her companions. She looked round and saw the captive, for Gruffydd was now bound hand and foot.

With a scream of wild exultation, she recognised him as a man from Nant-y-Bryn, and at the same moment I knew her for the woman who had begged in vain for the life of her son. She leapt to her feet, drew a knife, and rushed upon her prey, amid the applauding cries of her friends. I sprang forward just in time and caught her uplifted arm.

With swift adroitness, she changed the knife to her other hand, and was about to aim a blow at me, when I moved aside, and the firelight struck full on my face. The knife tinkled at my feet, and she clasped my arms and burst into a flood of speech and tears.

I . . . caught her uplifted arm.

"Old Megan iss asking your pardon," said Ieuan, who had watched everything, with his broad, cruel smile. "She wass not knowing you till she saw your face, and she iss now saying that there iss nothing which could persuade her to do you a mischief."

"And this poor wretch who has been brought here,' said I, "surely you will not put him to death in cold blood?"

"Indeed, I do not care anything either way," said Ieuan, stroking his beard, "yet, to be sure, if they should catch someone again as they did last night, they would not be so quick to hang him, if we had a man to hang, too. We could exchange as they do at the wars."

"And that's a good idea," said I.

"Yes," said Ieuan, with a smile of pleased vanity.

"Indeed, it iss." And from that instant Gruffydd's life was safe.

Food was now offered us, broiled mutton and oatmeal cakes, while a bundle of fodder was brought out for Whitesock.

A heap of dried rushes and ferns was assigned to me for a bed and, folded in my cloak, I slept easily and soundly

Upon my awakening the next morning, I rubbed my eyes and had some difficulty in recollecting where I was. The place looked much the same as on the previous night.

The huge turf fire had been piled up again, and was roaring gaily under a natural vent which led the smoke up to a crack in the hillside above. No daylight ever entered the cavern, but it was lighted night and day by the steady radiance of the ever-glowing peat and wood, of which a great pile was stacked in the driest corner.

The place was empty save for the wounded Red Men of the Dusk, and Megan, who was crouched within a yard of my couch, feeding Whitesock with morsels of oatcake, which the mare chewed slowly, yet with a relish as if appreciating the kindness which was meant.

I sprang up and shook myself, and Whitesock whinnied gaily. Megan stepped quickly forward, took my cloak, and busied herself with picking from it every bit of fern which clung to its surface, patting it and smoothing it and showing me every attention in her power. Then she turned to the fire and the hissing of her cookery was filling the place when Ieuan entered.

"Where is the prisoner?" said I.

"He iss as safe as you are," returned Ieuan, showing his white teeth in a smile. "Did I not say so? But he has been put in one of the other places."

He sat down on a block of wood near the fire and said no other word. Megan gave us the food when it was ready, and we ate it in silence.

For my part, I was busy enough in my thoughts. It was difficult to a degree to decide on my next movements. If I proceeded on my journey I left matters at such loose ends, both as regarded the prisoner in the hands of the Red Men of the Dusk, and my friends in hiding, that I should never have known a peaceful moment. If I went back to Nant-y-Bryn and confronted my uncle, it would only serve to acquaint him that he must lay still deeper and more careful plans to come at his ends. I could see nothing for it but to stand still for the present, and await the march of events.

I was brushing the crumbs of oatcake from my knees, when a smart pit-pat sounded on the floor, and a bare-footed Red Man of the Dusk ran in, his pike trailed in his hand, and his breath coming deeply, as if he had run fast and far.

Ieuan looked up and listened attentively to the man's story, then glanced thoughtfully into the fire.

"Where has this man come from?" said I.

"From Nant-y-Bryn," replied Ieuan.

"Nant-y-Bryn!" I cried.

"Yes," said Ieuan. "That bad old man shall not lift a finger but what I will hear of it, and I keep one or two there watching always."

"But they will be observed," said I.

Ieuan laughed scornfully, and waved his hand without deigning to reply, and I remembered the wild tangle of hills and ravines that rose to the north of the house, holding it in full view, and affording cover for an army.

"What news does he bring?" I asked.

"Owain has ridden away over the hills to the south, and two men with him," answered Ieuan.

"Where has he gone?" said I in wonder.

"I am not sure, but I can guess," retorted Ieuen, and he fell silent, biting the ends of his long moustache. In a short time he left the cave and I saw no more of him for some hours. I spent much of this time rambling about the tiny nook among the mountains where the Gwylliaid Cochion had made their retreat. I mounted a summit near by, and marked how wide and desolate the hills tumbled like stiffened billows all around. Only by the merest chance could their den be hit upon, and then, even when the rocky and carefully-guarded entrance was passed, it would be difficult to believe that the spot was inhabited. Besides the main cavern there were several other holes among the rocks, where the remaining families lived, and so cunningly were the entrances disposed, that it needed but the extinction of the fires to rob the place of all air of human occupancy.

It was towards the middle of the afternoon, and I had resumed my seat by the peats, when Ieuan appeared once more.

"We shall go now," said he, "and wait for Owain to come back again."

CHAPTER XVI.

Ieuan's Story.

I sprang to my feet at once, glad to exchange my present inaction for movement, and in a few minutes we were cantering briskly over the brown, frost-bitten turf. A couple of Ieuan's followers trotted after us, keeping up easily with the mountain pony which carried their tall leader. We held our way southward for several miles, along valleys and through solitary ravines, while the two Red Men of the Dusk ran, one on either flank, along the ridges, and watched the country.

At last we came to slopes dotted with sheep, and Ieuan rode more slowly, and his followers scouted more cautiously still. A tiny hut made of sharpened fir poles, driven into the ground, and wattled with furze, came into sight. I had seen several of them about the hills when riding with Owain, and knew that they served the hardy shepherds for shelter when it was necessary to spend a night upon the mountains.

"We will fasten our horses in this," said Ieuan, "and go a little on foot to see what they are doing."

The hut afforded just sufficient cover from the cutting wind, and I slipped Whitesock's rein round a corner pole, and followed Ieuan, who was marching for a cluster of boulders scattered on the crown of a rise before us. He reached them before me, and placed himself in cover of the tallest. I went up and glanced over his shoulder. Half-a-mile away to the west, the windows of Nant-y-Bryn flashed redly in the light of the sinking sun, figures moved about the front of it, the long, cooing cry of the women who herded the cattle rose faintly up the hillside to us, and the feeling that they were at ease and going peacefully about their usual tasks, came insensibly to the heart.

"We shall go now to those trees," said Ieuan, pointing to a clump of larches some distance to the right. "I must see what people shall come back with Owain."

He moved off as he spoke, and I said: "But what of the animals? Will they be safe there if we leave them?"

"Safe enough," returned Ieuan. "There is but one path which leads near the hut, and no one will be following it. It leads to Fron, and Fron is now empty."

"Fron," thought I, "that is the place where we went on the day of the heavy mist," and I admired the quick chance which had bandied me from the one side to the other.

Below the clump of larches a road passed along the hillside, and right through the midst of the little wood ran a path.

"Where does this path lead to?" I asked.

"To a farm called Tal-fryn up the hill here," returned Ieuan. He caught his breath and his nostrils dilated.

"They are no friends of yours, then?" said I, marking his emotion.

"Who said I was no friend to Winny Tal-fryn?" cried Ieuan, his eyes blazing darkly. "Come, now, who said that? You have heard of Tal-fryn before! Yes, yes, you have been told."

"Never in my life," said I. "I know nothing of the place or the people who live there; I never heard the name till you mentioned it a moment back."

"Then what made you say that?" cried Ieuan.

"You looked angry enough to eat the people," I returned.

"Angry!" said he. "Ay, well, angry. Yes; but not with her. No, indeed, not with her. Poor lass, indeed, I will never blame her." He stopped, and his features worked curiously. His face had the look often seen upon that of a child too proud to weep, yet having a hard struggle to keep tears back. In a few moments he had regained his composure, but remained silent, his eyes fixed on the road.

A sound caught my ears, and I looked up.

"Hist!" said I; "someone is coming through the wood."

The whisper had scarcely left my lips when a young woman, with a child running at her skirts, came round a bend in the path. She was tall and straight, dark-eyed, and fresh-coloured. Ieuan had sprung to my shoulder, and was peering over it. At sight of her, he fell a-trembling until he shook me. I glanced back and saw that his face was drawn hard and white, and set in a pitiful smile.

The young woman came on, and when she was within a yard of the brake in which we lay, Ieuan stepped out and confronted her.

She gave a cry, not, as it seemed to me, of fear, but rather of sorrow and surprise, covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears. The little boy set up a shout of terror, and clung to her, but she took no notice of him, and continued to weep convulsively. Ieuan began to speak rapidly in the softest and most caressing tones of his beautiful voice, but I understood, and wished to understand, nothing of what he said. As the couple approached us, something indefinably familiar in the child's face had riveted my attention, and the sad meeting before my eyes began to make the situation clear enough. Poor Ieuan! Poor Winny! They had been driven apart, that was clear, and I was at a loss to lay my finger upon the person who had driven them.

I turned back deeper into the brake and left the poor souls to themselves, and, in a few minutes, Ieuan came back to his post, tears dropping from his fierce eyes. He made no shame of them, as an Englishman would have done, but began to speak in a low, unsteady voice:

"Yes," said he; "I am sure you can see how it is with us. That is the young woman who was to have been my wife. But that bad old man robbed her away from me, and not honestly, either, and married her to a man who iss not fit to be her servant. Yes, Siencyn was very glad to marry Winny, and got a good farm for a reward. I had gone to England with a drove of ponies to the markets, and wass not back for months and months. And then I came to find her lost to me."

He stopped speaking, and set his face savagely in the direction of Nant-y-Bryn.

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"She will not say that she has seen us," I suggested.

"Not if you should offer her a mountain of gold," cried Ieuan; "not if you should make her a queen on a throne."

"And it was after that, when you shot at Sir Arthur, Ieuan!"

"It wass," he replied. "I had two tries to shoot him, but I am worth nothing in shooting, and missed him by far both times. If it had been the sword between us, now? But he took care about that. He rode with too many for me to try that. And next, what did he do?" cried Ieuan, with heightened colour and blazing eye. "He tried to sell me as a slave. A slave! Yes, I, a free son of the free hills."

"The trick is but too common now-a-days," I replied. "I, myself, have known three gentlemen of birth and fortune trepanned and sold to the plantations. But how did he get hold of you?"

"It wass like this," replied Ieuan Gwyllt. "I wass one day in the market of Aberystwyth, over there by the sea-side, when a man with big golden rings in his ears came to me and asked for news of two or three people who live about this country. I told him what I knew, and wondered why he should ask, for I could see that he wass a sailor and, as I fancied, a complete stranger to us. But he heard what I had to say with much pleasure and took me to a tavern to drink a glass with him. Well, I drank many glasses, for he wass paying for everything, and I thought it wass only his kindness. Indeed, I wass very ignorant then, and never thought there wass such a thing in the world as I wass soon to learn about. 'Well,' said this sailor man, 'I must go. You'll see me down to my boat?'

"'Ay, indeed I will,' I told him, for I thought he wass the finest man in the world. Now I wass feeling pretty well in the house, but when I came to the fresh air I wass just so drunk as possible. The man had a ship lying out in the bay, and a boat was waiting for him in a very quiet bend lying between the river-mouth and the castle. I wass in such a state that it wass quite easy to get me to go out to the ship with them.

"There I had a glass of rum—and, indeed, I remember no more till the next morning, and then we were miles out in the sea. Well, I made a great noise; but the captain he laughed, and said that when it wass time for him to go I wass too drunk to go ashore, so he left me alone. 'But,' said he, 'I am putting into Aberteify this afternoon. You can go ashore there.'

"I wass quite satisfied with that, but I saw no Aberteify that day—indeed, I wass too sick to see anything. The next morning I wass a little better and I asked the captain about Aberteify. Well, he just laughed again, and said he had changed his mind about calling at that place and I must go to Bristol with him now, as that was the place for the ship to stop next, and then I could go where I liked.

"By this time I wass not easy in my mind. But I wass very careful not to look anxious, because that would spoil the chance of getting away. That morning the wind dropped and the ship lay on the water all day without moving. We were not very far from the land, perhaps it wass two miles, perhaps not so much, and the little white cottages on the hills of Sir Benfro, that iss, in your language, Pembrokeshire, looked very pleasant to my eyes. If the captain had wished to set me on the shore he could have done it very easily with the boat, but he never made the offer, and I took care not to ask him, for I wished to look so innocent as possible and willing to go to Bristol or anywhere with them. I knew quite well by now that if I made a noise they would shut me up somewhere, and spoil all my chances. Yet I could not understand what they wanted with me.

"That afternoon, having nothing to do, they got to the liquor, and made themselves very drunk. They offered me some, and I pretended to drink with them and be very merry, but I wass careful to keep my wits. There was a little boy on the ship, and one of the drunken sailors wass beating him and beating him with a piece of rope, just for nothing at all.

"Well, I stopped that, and kept the boy by me where he was safe; and lucky for me I did, for that little boy told me everything. He told me that the ship was going about picking up people here and there, and taking them to Bristol to sell them for slaves. Then they were carried across the sea and set to work in a far country under a burning sun, and were beaten with whips if they dared to grumble. Is that all true?"

"Perfectly true, Ieuan," said I. "True as gospel."

"And what else did the little boy tell me?" cried Ieuan, grinding his teeth furiously. "This, this is what he told me: that he had heard the captain say to the mate that he was to have twelve pounds from someone he called Sir Arthur, besides the price of me in Bristol. Is that clear to you?"

"Clear enough," said I. "The things hangs together as straight as a string."

"Well, I should think so," snorted Ieuan. "I think that, indeed."

"How did you come clear?" I asked.

"Oh, my heart was on fire," cried Ieuan, "when I heard such things. The sky was red instead of blue before me but I kept very quiet, and waited for the darkness.

"I could swim well, and the sea was so smooth as a pool. Well, when it was dark, I crept to the end of the ship where no one was and took off my clothes, and slipped down a rope that was hanging in the water, and so got into the sea without a sound, though, indeed, they were too drunk in the ship to trouble much about a noise if I had made it.

"There was a light in a house on a hill, shining like a pretty star, and guiding me straight to the shore.

"I was a long, long time getting there, for I am a slow swimmer, though I can swim far; but at last I put my feet down, and felt the sand. Ah, how I ran that night!

"The stones cut my feet, and the bushes tore my naked body, but I ran and ran, wishing for nothing but to leave the sea and the ship far behind me.

"The next morning I found myself close to a little farm, and I went there to beg for food. At first the people were frightened and thought I was a madman. But they were very good people, and sorry for me when they heard all my story, and they gave me food and some clothes. And now I was safe, and made my way back easily over the hills."

"A very lucky end to your story, Ieuan," said I, "there are many and many a one working this day in the plantations, trepanned and decoyed as you were."

"And shall I let the man escape who did all this to me?" cried Ieuan Gwyelt. "No, no," and he poured forth a fierce torrent of words in his own tongue, in which he could express his feelings more easily.

His outburst was deep rather than loud, and was dying away in savage mutterings, when I laid my hand on his arm, "Horses, and many of them," said I.

A confused trampling had come to my ears, and we listened intently. A rider appeared round a corner of the hill, and another, and another. The first four were Owain and three gaily-dressed young men about his own age. Then followed a dozen mounted and well-armed fellows.

Some trotting, some cantering, spurs and harness jingling gaily, swords rattling, talking and laughing, they rode past us down the slope, heading for Nant-y-Bryn.

"Fifteen," said Ieuan softly, when the last horseman had ridden by, "and that is twelve come to help."

"From where, and for what?" I asked.

"From a man who is a savage enemy to us," replied Ieuan; "Sir Lewis Mervyn, of Aberafon. He is living about twenty-five miles away over the hills, and he has sent his two sons and his nephew and ten men at once."

Ieuan turned and strode back rapidly towards the little hut and our horses, and I followed, seeing my dilemma thickening and thickening around me.

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"And root out this ancient mischief." Owain's words came to my mind, and I perceived why he was returning in such force. He had been to obtain aid from another magnate whose lands had been harassed by the Red Men of the Dusk, and now the latter were to be pursued with fire and sword, and an end made of their troublesome presence.

And what was I to do? Run away from people who had rendered me a signal service, or stand by them and fight like a rat in a hole against my love's brother, and my friend? It was a Gordian knot which I am thankful that events cut for me, as you shall hear.

CHAPTER XVII.

ENTANGLEMENTS.

THE two men who had followed us from the mountain fastness of the Gwylliard Cochion were no longer with us. They had received orders from Ieuan to hold the place under surveillance from different points, and had gone to their posts. We were passing the hill top boulders on our return to the hut when a sound of voices came on the wind. We slipped in among the huge stones, and looked out for the speakers.

The sun was now below the hills, but the cloudless evening sky was filled with a clear, frosty light of palest saffron. Over a near ridge came a small party, riding on ponies. They cantered rapidly down the valley, and Ieuan began to whistle softly through his teeth. I understood his fear, and hoped with all my heart that the horses in the hut would keep quiet. But, no. As the newcomers drew near, Ieuan's steed neighed shrilly. A man sprang down, and ran into the place. We heard from the distance his loud cry of surprise and, within the instant, he was out again, leading Whitesock.

I remained in ambush no longer. Tucking my sword under my arm, I ran, as fast as my heavy riding boots would allow me, down the slope.

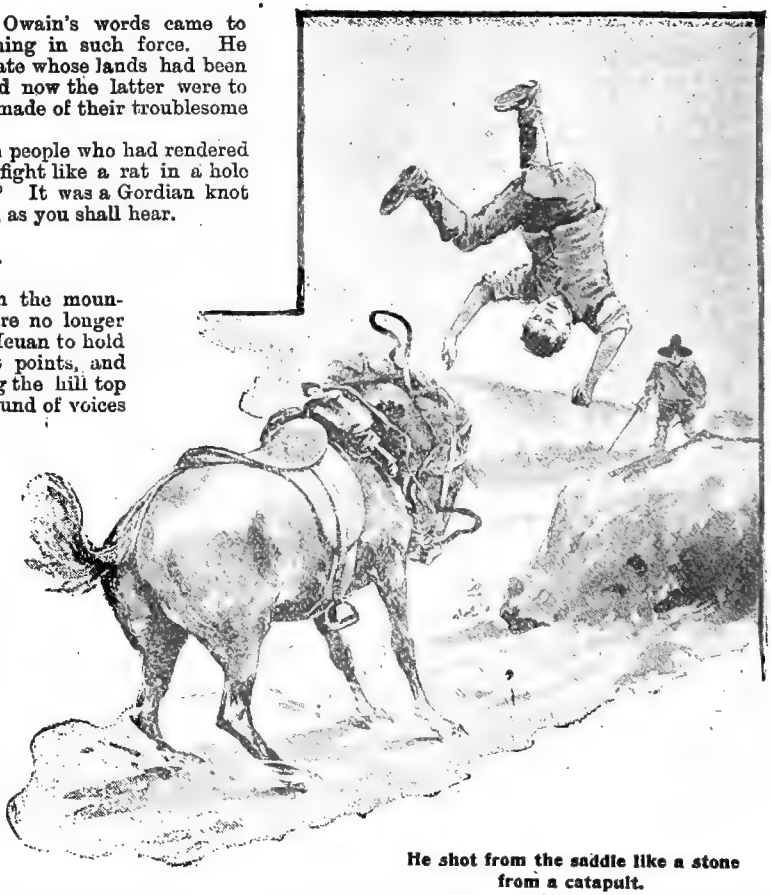
Loud cries burst from the riders, and among them I heard the mare's name called aloud twice in a shrill, female voice. They were on a smooth stretch before me, and I had them clear against the sky down to their horses' fetlocks. I saw the man who had seized Whitesock leap into the saddle and urge her forward, and I saw the swift end she made of his attempt to carry her off. Snorting with rage, she bounded to and fro, swinging her luckless rider right and left, springing high from the ground, and, with four heels gathered in a bunch and her back arched like a bow, she did her utmost to unseat him.

But, for a while, he clung to the saddle, for these mountain people ride almost before they walk. Then she put down her head and darted forward at an incredible speed. I was now not far away, and heard her unhappy captor's loud laugh as he felt her shoot steadily away, and thought that he had mastered her.

Pausing, I collected all my breath and gave the whistle Whitesock knew.

She slewed round instantly and flew towards me. Confused shouts arose from the party, and I heard the cry of 'Ieuan Gwyelt" and the "Gwylliard Cochion," and as Whitesock came swiftly on, the bunch of riders scoured away over the hill towards Nant-y-Bryn.

As they went, I caught for an instant the flutter of female garments, but it was a mere glimpse, and my attention was at once drawn to the play nearer at hand. The rider was struggling furiously, but to no effect, for the mare had the bit between her teeth, and there was no holding her. Suddenly she stopped dead just as he reached to a shorter grip of the reins. He must have eased the clutch of his knees in doing so, for, at that full pause, he shot from the saddle like a stone from a catapult. Turning twice in the air, he fell, at a moment when his body was as straight as a bar, square across a hog-backed boulder near at hand.



He shot from the saddle like a stone from a catapult.

There was a sharp crack as of a breaking stick, and his head struck the rock with a heavy thud. He gave one cry and threw out his hands, then neither spoke nor stirred again, but hung as limp as a scarf, his heels dangling on the one side and his head on the other.

I stood for an instant on guard, but, seeing no signs of his companions coming to his aid or to attack me, I ran to his side. I drew him down from the boulder and laid him on the grass, but a glance sufficed to show that no aid could avail him. He was quite dead. The knife-edged rock had broken his back as a man snaps a rotten twig, and he had paid his life as the price of that short, fierce ride. I knew him at once. It was the man who had smitten Whitesock across the face with the bucket.

A pony came galloping at top speed, and I sprang to arms, but dropped my sword-point instantly. It was Ieuan, and laughing as he rode.

"Well," said he, "and did you catch him? I frightened those others who were with him and made them run away. His horse was running loose, and so I caught it and came back on it. There is a pair of pistols in the holsters, so I am in good luck, for we have but few of such things."

I related the manner in which the unfortunate fellow had come to his end, and Ieuan bared his white teeth in a gratified smile.

"One less," said he. "That is something, though they are now so strong that one does not make much difference."

"Were there not women in the party?" I asked.

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"Yes, indeed," said Ieuan, "the sister of Owain it was, and Siani, her woman, and two or three men marching with them to guard them."

The sister of Owain! Enid had fled before me. She had see Whitesock, and heard my whistle. Siani had cried out the mare's name. Ieuan had executed some movement which had caused them to fear an ambush of the Red Men of the Dusk. What would she, what could she think of me? I, in league with the Gwylliard Cochion, and, apparently, lying in wait to entrap stragglers from Nant-y-Bryn. I moved about restlessly, and my eyes fell upon the dead man. Here was a fresh and dreadful tangle. He is carried back by Whitesock to my whistle, and is found dead the next day at the same spot. And a man known to be on ill terms with me. I gritted my teeth together in perplexity. The face of the prostrate figure was turned away from us.

"Who is he?" asked Ieuan.

"I have seen him at Nant-y-Bryn, but I do not know his name," I answered.

Ieuan walked forward, caught a lock of hair dangling over the forehead, and turned up the face, lifting the head. He dropped it as if the touch had burnt him, and sprang back with the wild cry of a surprise beyond words.

"Who is it?" I cried in turn.

Ienan turned on me a face in which shone great eyes of wonder and fierce joy.

"Siencyn Tal-fryn," he replied slowly.

"The husband of Winny?"

"Yes."

He fetched out his pony from the hut without another word, and we rode some distance in silence. When we began speaking again it was with reference to the band which Owain had led down the hill to Nant-y-Bryn.

"It is easy to see what they have come for," said Ieuan, nodding his head gloomily. "There are but few of the Gwylliard Cochion left, and, indeed, there will be an end to them very soon."

This did not seem to me altogether a pure evil, but I refrained from saying so.

"How long has your sect flourished?" I asked.

"From old times," replied Ieuan proudly. "It is now about a hundred years since they were at their full strength. They were lords of the mountains many miles to the north of here, and no one dared to say them nay. But Baron Owen came down upon them suddenly with an army and took them by surprise, and slew a hundred or more. Many a time have I heard the story, when I was a child, from a very old man whose mother carried him far over the hills on her back that night."

"And since then they have never been so formidable?" said I.

"Never," said Ieuan. "Small bands of them have held their own in the depths of the hills—hills which they know as a man knows his house, but the numbers have grown less and less, and now——" He stopped and sighed as sadly as if the Gwylliard Cochion were a blameless and persecuted remnant. He remained silent for a while, then burst out in an inconsequent fashion, as if uttering his thoughts aloud:

"And yet I should not like her to think I killed her husband."

"To be sure not," I replied, perceiving that he spoke of the man of Tal-fryn. "It was an accident which might happen to anyone. To be flung from a horse and killed is a common misfortune."

"If I could have it made plain to her," said Ieuan dubiously, "things, perhaps, would come better yet."

"There is nothing more likely," I returned. "And, for myself, I should be glad to tell Owain the truth of the matter."

"Yes," said Ieuan, laughing aloud. "Things are looking rather strange with you, too."

"They are," I returned, and again we rode for some time in silence, each busy with his own thoughts.

"Ieuan," said I, "what were you going to do with Miss Vaughan and Siani that first night I came across you?"

"When you took them back, eh?" replied Ieuan. "But there wass no harm meant for them. No, indeed!" he cried, slapping his thigh, "no harm at all, indeed. But I would have used Miss Vaughan to draw her brother from that bad old man. I would have sent to Owain a word that his sister was safe and well among us, and only waiting for him to come away from Nant-y-Bryn, and promise to stop away, and then he should have her again. That wass the plan that came to my mind when I heard that she wass on the road."

"What made you so anxious to detach Owain from the garrison?" I asked.

"Indeed, I am fond of him," replied Ieuan simply. "I would fight twice as gladly against Nant-y-Bryn if Owain was not there. I taught him to ride and to play with the sword, and I went with his father to the wars when I wass a tall lad myself."

This was the outcome of my thoughts during the previous silence; Ieuan now turned to his.

"They are telling me," he said, "that you are very rich."

"Who are telling you?"

"Well, no one now, of course, but I have heard many times of Butley Croft, and the rich English people living there named Heathcote."

I laughed, for, of a surety, my riches were swiftly taking wings to themselves by this time, and deserting me as an obstinate malignant.

"The rents, now," insinuated Ieuan gently, "the rents in a rich country like that will come to much money in a year."

I smiled, and humoured him.

"Last year," I replied, "they ran to something over sixteen hundred pounds."

"Ah!" cried Ieuan in a deep, rich tone of admiration. "In one year, one little year. And how does it feel to be so rich as that?"

"'How did it feel?'" thought I, "would be a more correct phrase," but I said nothing.

"From all that money," said Ieuan reflectively, "a one hundred pounds would hardly be missed."

"And what would you do with the hundred pounds when you got it, Ieuan?" I asked.

"I!" he laughed, and threw his hand out gaily. "I would stock a little farm."

"What!" said I. "And leave the Red Men of the Dusk?"

"Yes, indeed," said he, "when I have done what I want with them."

"And where is the little farm?" I asked.

"Oh, that is just a fancy," said Ieuan cautiously. "It is only what I have been thinking. I shall not stop with them all my life."

He lapsed into silence and I said no more until we reached our destination.

That night the Red Men of the Dusk sat long in council around the huge fire of peats in the cavern. I was none the wiser for the husky, growling whispers in which they deliberated, but Ieuan told me in two words, when his lean, wolfish friends had returned each to his own hole in the rocks, that they had resolved to shift their quarters before the threatened onslaught was delivered. As for myself, my mind was made up. I would ride over to the neighbourhood of Nant-y-Bryn and see whether luck would send Owain in my way. I could not rest until I had put myself something in the right as regarded the events of the twilight.

(To be continued.)

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.. From Prairie and Backwoods. ..

VI.—LET-DOWN FOR THE "MISSUS."

Old Man Jacobs's wife was a woman of administrative ability. Consequently when Jacobs decided that the period had arrived for a night in town, he left the homestead in Nan's charge without compunction. There was only one trouble likely to arise, he said. If Black Pete stole any more chickens it was no use protesting any longer. He would have to be pursued and punished, and he felt badly about being away with that prospect in prominence.

Nan, who never minced matters with her better half, flashed out with the assertion that he was a coward—declared he was going away because he was afraid of Black Pete. Not that it mattered, said Nan. On the contrary he could not do a wiser thing than make himself scarce when there was anything to be done which wanted more than a child's intelligence. She would fix Black Pete, said Nan. She didn't want any fool-man's help for that.

So Old Man Jacobs departed. He chuckled to himself as he shambled through the front garden gate. When Nan called after him to know what he was laughing at, he said nothing. As a matter of fact he was wondering about Black Pete, because there was a lurking suspicion in his head that the nigger would rather reform than go chicken-stealing that night if he knew about Nan.

Black Pete, however, was laying his plans in all innocence. He spent the day as usual loafing about on the sea-shore between drinks. About six o'clock, when dusk was beginning to fall, he retired to the small cabin he inhabited, shook out a couple of sacks, fastened them with a bit of string under his coat, and set out for a stroll.

Chance led him in the direction of the Jacobs' ranch, and his attention was attracted by a queer sound in the neighbourhood of the hen coop. It was a sound of feathered turbulence suggesting that there was one chicken too many for the perch, so that each time the odd chicken on the floor made a dash for the pole one at the other end was bumped off.

Black Pete knew that Old Man Jacobs was away, and in his absence it would only be courteous of him to go in and settle the difficulty either by enlarging the roost or by removing one of the chickens. The latter seemed to be the more simple plan, especially as he had a sack with him at the time, and taking care not to alarm Mrs Jacobs by making a needless disturbance, he approached the chicken-house, and by quietly removing one of the boards at the back, which someone had apparently loosened for this purpose, he managed to secure one of the roistering chickens by the slack of its neck in such a manner that it yielded voicelessly to his persuasive touch and disappeared from the roost so silently that not one of its fellows noticed the incident. They noticed merely that there was, of a sudden, accommodation for twenty chickens on a bar that had only seemed roomy enough for nineteen.

Having inserted his prize in one of the bags that he carried, Black Pete would have returned peacefully home to his supper, had he not on rounding the corner of the chicken-house run into the arms of Nan.

Any other woman might have been startled at suddenly finding herself precipitated into the arms of a herculean nigger. It is certain that all other women would have been suspicious at encountering this notorious thief in the neighbourhood of her chicken roost; but Nan merely remarked that it was a pleasant evening, and that it was mighty nice of Pete to come round to pay her a visit knowing her husband was away.

She said she had been feeling a bit nervous and lonely, and if Pete would care to step inside why she had just taken a nice piece of rabbit off the stove, and not being quite herself that night she had opened a bottle of whisky that Old Man Jacobs had brought back last time he went to town.

For some years Pete had entertained a secret admiration for the mature but buxom figure of Missus Jacobs. The smile which she bestowed upon him as an accompaniment to the invitation loosened all his ideas on the immorality of making love to another man's wife in the absence of her husband.

Something fluttered under his coat. It may have been that for a moment he mistook it for the fluttering of his own heart, for he yielded to the temptation. Remembering himself in time, however, he said he would go home first and change his coat. Nan would not hear of it. Pete insisted. Nan said the rabbit would be getting cold, and she wouldn't be surprised if someone else might drop in while he was absent, and a bottle of whisky wouldn't go far between three.

Black Pete followed his charming hostess inside the

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shanty. At the sight of the nicely spread table he felt abashed; but Nan, with rare tact, made him feel at home. It was hot in the kitchen, she said; he might take off his coat and hang it upon the nail behind the door. Black Pete didn't find it hot; he always preferred to keep his coat on in the presence of ladies.

Old Man Jacobs' wife asked whether she was running the place or whether Black Pete was. Thus admonished Pete retired towards the door, took off his coat, and, opening the door, stepped out with the apparent intention of expectorating. This not being contrary to etiquette in that part of the world the incident might have passed unnoticed if Nan, with a true woman's curiosity, had not wondered what was in the sack that Pete was dumping in the front porch. Pete smiled unhealthily. Nan wouldn't be surprised if it was a secret. Pete allowed that it was a secret.

Nan took a long breath; but knowing quite well what was in the bag, having been present when it was put in, she did not press the subject.

Pushing the bottle of whisky towards Pete (the latter with considerable breeding making no comment on the absence of glasses on the table) Nan excused herself gracefully, because she noticed that there was no water in the house, and she would just run round to the shed and get some.

The out-house in question was a square wooden hut strongly made and with an excellent padlock on the door. Nan opened it with a key that she carried in her pocket, and filled her jug from a pail of water that was standing on an immense block of ice, one of the luxuries that she permitted the carrier to bring out to her once a week from the town.

Black Pete replaced the bottle on the table as she entered. It seemed unaccountable to him that he should have lived so long in the neighbourhood without getting on terms of social intercourse with Mrs. Jacobs. He felt ashamed because he had listened to stories about her which had led him to believe that whatever her abilities she had no virtues, that she was a quick-tongued, ready-fisted woman, who succeeded in making her husband's life a terror to him.

It was common gossip that Mrs. Jacobs was master in her own house, that she insisted on having things her own way, and gave everyone to understand that she was the only woman with an idea in her head that side of the Selkirk mountains.

This was all nonsense, according to Pete.

Between them they made the rabbit look foolish, and the bottle of whisky grew lighter each time that it passed round. Pete's yellow eyes were beginning to roll in his head. He brought his chair nearer to Mrs. Jacobs, and that lady not seeming to object, he playfully laid one of his hands upon hers.

What a nice man he was to be sure! And Mrs. Jacobs had heard such dreadful stories about Black Pete stealing her neighbours' poultry. They both laughed, and in pure good feeling Black Pete endeavoured to capture Nan's other hand, but failed. Besides, if a man like Black Pete wanted to steal chickens, why he could. No one would dare say a word to him. He drew up the sleeve of his shirt and doubled his big arm admiringly. Then he tapped the hip pocket of his trousers. People might think he stole chickens, but they didn't say so to his face. He made another grab for Nan's disengaged hand, and failed still more clumsily, almost banging his head on the table.

Nan put one hand affectionately on the back of his

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curly pate, and this time his head banged against the corner of the table in a way that made the knives and forks rattle. He fell like a log on to the floor. Nan waited a moment to make sure that the whisky had done its work, and then she proceeded to the door and opened it wide.

Returning, she grasped Black Pete by the hair and dragged him unceremoniously out of the house and across the back yard. Her strength would have surprised her admirer had he been in a state to appreciate what she was accomplishing single-handed.

Strong woman though she was, it required all her strength to drag the prostrate giant into the out-house. Her first idea had been to lock him in there, where he would, no doubt, cool off by the time Old Man Jacobs returned. The notion of his cooling off put a new idea into her head, however.

The chief objection that Old Man Jacobs had to his wife was that she continually had ideas. He said that a woman with ideas was as big a fool as a man without them. Nan remembered this against him, and having now a really brilliant idea she determined to put it into execution, and to hold it over the old man when he should see fit to shamble back again to his domestic hearth.

Foraging in a cupboard she produced a piece of strong cord. Then removing the pail from the block of ice she grasped Black Pete under the arm pits, and hoisted him upon it, securing him with four or five mightily fine loops and knots. She stood for a moment regarding her handiwork with a pleased expression.

"He'll cool off, and learn not to come chicken stealing and taking my hands in his," she reflected. "Old Man don't think much of my ideas gen'rilly, but if this doesn't beat all creation." She was stopped in her laughter by noticing first one and then the other of Black Pete's eyes opening. "Seems to have been having bad dreams," thought Nan.

The most frightful terror was depicted on his hideous countenance, and as he gradually realised the fact that it was real cold he was sitting on and not part of a nightmare in which an Arctic hades had been provided for the reformation of his darkened soul, he emitted a yell that went very near to lifting the roof off the four corners of the out-house. The yell ended in a hurricane of profanity that he might have picked up during the course of his nightmare. But though he yelled and swore and strained his big muscular frame, not an inch could he move hand or foot.

"It ain't a particle of use for yer to break them strings," said Nan consolingly; "yer froze to it."

"Let me up!" yelled Pete.

"Not I. Yer'll stop right there. And no telling but what Old Man Jacobs will happen around later on with a gun and want to know what I'm doing with a bloomin' stalagmite histing itself in the out-house."

The big eyes rolled with terror.

Nan retired for a moment, and returned with the neglected sack, which she proceeded to open by the light of the lantern that hung in a corner of the room.

"Why, bless my heart if it ain't a chicken," she exclaimed derisively. "Maybe it should be put on ice."

An odd piece of string was lying on the ground, and, making a loop in this, she proceeded with the dexterity of a good housewife to hang the chicken round Black Pete's neck.

"Old Man would never hev thought out that," she said, regarding this masterpiece of ingenuity with a smile of great satisfaction. "Well, good-night, Mr. Pete. I'll leave the door ajar, and ef yer want anything maybe yer'll call."

She took the precaution to feel his bonds, and being satisfied that they were irreproachably secure, and that, as she had hinted, the back of his clothes were frozen hard on to the ice-block, she shook her fist in his face and retired.

Old Man Jacobs returned by the early train, and about five o'clock shuffled into his wife's room wearing a sheepish expression which he was unable to avoid after one of his periodical escapes from his wife's dominion. Instead of welcoming with her usual charge of satire, however, she received him with some show of friendliness. Encouraged by this the old man feebly attempted to work in a cut of his own.

"Did yer lose any chicken last night, dearie?" he inquired, looking at her from the corner of a watery eye.

"Not one," she answered gloryingly. "Yer give me a woman that's got a modicum of wits agin a whole army of men that ain't any better than yer."

The old man subsided into his chair abashed. Nan in the meanwhile had risen and dressed.

"Git out of that and come with me," she said commandingly.

"Where to, missus?" asked the old man, who did not feel much energy after his night's dissipation.

"There's Black Pete out in the shed. Oh, yer needn't be afraid," she added contemptuously, "he's tied."

"Tied!" echoed the old man, rubbing his eyes. "Who helped yer?"

"Ain't I got ideas of my own," she asked sharply. "Git along."

Obedient as ever to the behests of his wife, Old Man Jacobs shuffled amiably in front of her.

"Maybe we'll hev that chicken that Black Pete named for lunch to-day," she said considerately.

Arrived at the out-house the door was still ajar, as it had been when she left it the previous night. Nan felt herself bursting with pride as she hastened the somewhat timid steps of her better half by a vigorous shove.

"Look inside," she said delightedly.

Old Man Jacobs did not much relish an encounter with Black Pete, but not seeing any way out of it he opened the door gingerly and thrust his head in.

"Well," said Nan impatiently. She pushed him aside. In the further corner of the room was a big pool of water, and lying in it dank and brown a coiled and knotted piece of rope.

"Where's Black Pete?" inquired Old Man Jacobs with natural curiosity.

"Gone, you fool," snapped his better half. "The ice had melted down, you see. Anyone else 'ud be ashamed to come home to a wife so drunk that he couldn't see that."

"Anyhow we've got the chicken," said the old man in his most conciliatory tone. "Where's the chicken?"

"Well, if you ain't——" shouted Mrs. Jacobs, words absolutely failing her in the extremity of her wrath. "Where d'ye think the chicken would be now seeing that it was tied round his neck. Where?"

"Yer ain't fit to be left in charge of the homestead," said Old Man Jacobs with a sudden flash of contempt. "It'll be a long time afore I leave the place again—you and your ideas."

"That's it," cried Nan, "you're always the same with your repenting the mornin' after. Why don't you get a broom and wipe up that mess in the outhouse instead of standing there talking."

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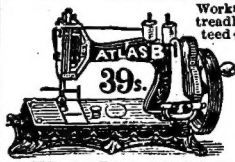

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AIDS TO ACCURACY.

C. G.—It is impossible to lay down exact rules for everybody. Some people live to be centenarians, apparently, in spite of their habits. One old man of ninety-seven all his life drank quantities of neat gin, and smoked the strongest, rankest tobacco; while the Rev. W. Davis, who died in 1790 at 105, and who ought to have known better, for the last thirty-five years of his life never took exercise, began the day on hot buttered rolls, and ended it with a supper of hot roast meat with plenty of wine.

P. T.—The cost of St. Peter's, Rome, was over £14,000,000.

E. J. L.—It is estimated that in Paris one in eighteen of the population live on charity, with a tendency towards crime; in London this class is one in thirty.

Rosy.—Vast quantities of flowers are gathered for perfumery purposes. Each year it is estimated that 1,860 tons of orange flowers are used, besides 930 tons of roses, 150 tons each of violets and jasmines, 75 tons of tuberoses, 30 tons of cassia, and 15 tons of jonquils.

Celt.—Over 10,000 Irish people settle in England every year.

U. S.—In the time of Columbus, before the memorable voyage of discovery, the scientists asserted that if a ship should reach India, sailing due west, she could never get back again, because the rotundity of the earth (the spheroid character of the globe had been previously demonstrated) would present a kind of mountain, up which it would be impossible to sail, even with the most favourable wind.

H.—There are 130,000 Jewish soldiers under the Russian flag.

Ex.—Oh, no! Experts say that the buried city of Pompeii has not yet yielded up half of its artistic treasure; that at the present rate of progress seventy years will elapse before it is thoroughly unearthed.

Wheel.—Rather an uncommon banking arrangement is carried on in the Manawatu district of New Zealand. It may be described as a kind of portable teller's office. On certain days of the week a clerk from one of the Palmerston banks travels up and down the railway line from Palmerston to Otaki, transacting the ordinary business of the bank *en route*. Laden with a sachel containing his supply of cash, and provided with a teller's usual precautions against danger of robbery, he makes the carriage his headquarters, and there receives visits from customers at the way stations, changing cheques or taking deposits, as occasion may require.

Owner.—The Duke of Northumberland is the greatest landowner in England. He owns over 200,000 acres. His land reaches from sea to sea, in the north of England, and he can ride a hundred miles from his feudal castle without going off his own demesne.

Forest.—One third of the land surface of the earth is covered with forests.

F.—A shoal of herrings is supposed to consist in numbers from 800,000 to 1,000,000.

Bawbee.—Half-farthings were coined in 1843, but were speedily removed from circulation.

W. J. B.—The manufacture of cigarettes in France began in 1843, and at first the factory at Gros Caillou was able to supply the demand. Now there are several factories at work, employing 2,000 women, who turn out 400,000,000 cigarettes every year.

Law.—A Hindoo jury consists of five persons.

S. H.—What is called tortoise-shell is not the bony covering or shield of the turtle, but only the scales which cover it. These are thirteen in number, eight of them flat and five a little curved. A large turtle affords about eight pounds of them, the plates varying from an eight to a quarter of an inch in thickness. The fishers do not kill the turtles; did they do so they would in a few years exterminate them. When a turtle is caught they fasten him and cover his back with dry leaves or grass, to which they set fire. The heat causes the plates to separate at their joints; a large knife is then carefully inserted horizontally beneath them, and the scales lifted from the back.

Wales.—Nearly one million people still speak Welsh.

C. T.—The Lord Chancellor receives the good round sum of £500 for proroguing Parliament, and the same sum for the opening of the Houses "by Commission."

Rail.—The railways of the world are worth six thousand million pounds.

Mex.—You are mistaken. The Mexicans are an exceedingly polite people. Should one lady express her admiration for another's baby, the mother replies, "It is entirely at your disposal." When two ladies meet, they lift their right hand, gently tap each other on the left shoulder, and then shake hands very heartily. If they are intimate friends, after going through the foregoing ceremony, they also kiss, not with the lips, but by laying the cheeks softly together.

W. D.—Only about one out of every 1,000 married couples live to celebrate their golden wedding.

Legal.—Under old European law the crew and passengers of wrecked vessels could be imprisoned and enslaved, their property reverting to the lord of the coast or to the Crown.

W. E. T.—The annual rainfall in the West of England is normally forty-seven inches; in the East twenty-seven inches.

Gun.—Krupp guns cost £170 per ton.

Grimace.—In England, as we know, placing the thumb to the nose and extending the fingers is the sign of derision; but among certain hill tribes in India it is the most expressive manner of showing respect.

Smith.—There are nearly 400 blacksmiths in England.

M. B.—A recent survey established the number of glaciers in the Alps at 1,155, of which 249 have a length of more than four and three-quarter miles; the French Alps contain 144 glaciers, those of Italy seventy-eight, Switzerland, 471, and Austria 462.

F. H.—The Freihaus, in a suburb of Vienna, is one of the most spacious buildings on the globe. Within its walls a whole city of human beings live and work, eat and sleep. It contains in all about 1,500 rooms, divided into upwards of 400 dwelling apartments, of from four to six rooms each. This immense house has thirteen courtyards, five open and eight covered, and a large garden within its walls.

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INSIDE AND OUTSIDE.

It is the fellow who stands inside the house and looks out through the window that most enjoys the storm. How jolly to see the passers-by struggling against the wind or scudding before it, their coat collars up to their ears, their hats jammed down on their heads, slapping and slashing over the flooded pavements, soaked to the skin, maybe, cursing the weather with what breath they may have left, as they pelt and writhe along the road. Great fun, I say, this is for the man who looks out through the window. Not his are the wet clothes "clinging like cerements," as poor Tom Hood said about the girl who had ended her sorrows, as so many do, in the Thames. Not his the able-bodied chance of catching a bad cold and getting floored with rheumatism or pneumonia. Oh, no; he is on the right side of the brick wall, snug as a bug in a rug, and dry as a bone. So he just fills himself full up with what is probably one of the meanest forms of delight, the enjoyment of witnessing the miseries of others. You may not believe it, but I know people who take a distinct and positive pleasure in attending funerals for the sake of looking upon the grief of the afflicted and hugging the idea that it is somebody else and not they themselves who is being macerated and ground up in the merciless mill of sorrow.

On the same lines we may regard strong, healthy persons; they who have been hearty as pigs all their lives; they who eat like hungry horses and sleep like policemen off duty; who have scarce ever had a pang or a pain, and fancy that illness in others is a culpable weakness, if not an absolute sin. I have a notion to add that chronically well people are the coldest blooded wretches on earth. There! I *have* said it, and it's true.

"For over ten years," says the writer, "I had suffered from indigestion and weakness. I felt weak, low, and heavy. I had no appetite, and when I sat down to the table, often I could not touch a morsel of food. After meals I had excruciating pain at the chest, through to the back; also a gnawing constant pain under the shoulder blade. I had frequent bilious attacks, being so sick that I could not lift my head from the pillow.

"At night I was restless, getting no proper sleep, and in the morning feeling worse tired than when I went to bed. I was much swoollen about the waist, and was constantly belching wind. I got gradually weaker and weaker, it being a misery to get about. I continued like this for ten years, never being well, and not knowing what it was to enjoy my meals. I saw doctor after doctor (I am sure that I consulted twenty doctors), who gave me medicines, but I received no benefit from them. They did not suit my case.

"I gave up all hope of ever getting well again, and wished that I was dead, always fretting at my weak state. In April of last year (1896) a pamphlet was sent me by post, and I read about Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. My symptoms were accurately described in this small book, and I determined to try it.

"I sent to Mr. Coppin's Stores, Marsham Street, Westminster, for a bottle of this medicine. After taking it a few days I found it was doing me good. I could eat and enjoy my food, which agreed with me. This gave me confidence, and I continued with it, and soon all the pain left me, and I felt as strong and well as ever I did in my life. I felt brighter, and could eat anything, nothing coming amiss. I have since kept in good health, taking an occasional dose when required. You can make what use you like of this statement, and refer anyone to me. (Signed) (Mrs.) Annie White, 117 High Road, New Southgate, London, N., August 10th, 1897."

This lady is the wife of Mr. H. White, butcher, New Southgate. In private conversation they both speak very enthusiastically of Mother Seigel's Syrup. Mrs. White says that although during her long illness she could scarcely walk at all, she can now walk six miles without fatigue. And that is not half a bad tramp, even for a woman who has never been ill. Many of them cannot do as much. That our correspondent *can* is a striking illustration of the power of the medicine that cured her. I who write these lines have not always had the luck to be looking out of the window at other people fighting the bad weather. I have been bowed down under the tempest of sickness and pain myself. And so have millions. And it is *we* who sympathise with Mrs. White and rejoice with her on her recovery.

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Notice.—"DOLLY" Blue is neatly tied in a white bag to a small handle to hold by whilst using. Sold only in Plain White Calico Bags. No blue (whether in bags or not), except that of Messrs. Wm. Edge & Sons Ltd., can be Sold as "Dolly" Blue. "Dolly" Blue is sold by all Grocers and Oilmen at 1d. per bag.

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The Public are cautioned against attempts which may be made to supply other Blue, Tints and Dyes than those of Messrs. Wm. Edge and Sons Ltd., when "Dolly" Blue, "Dolly" Tints, and "Dolly" Dyes are ordered.

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